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Historical geography of early nineteenth century Western Australia

D. Markey

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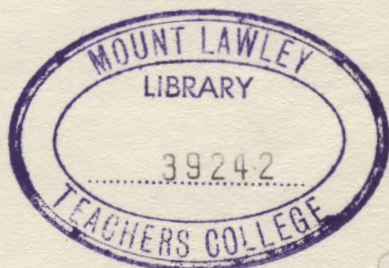
**Historical Geography
of Early Nineteenth Century
Western Australia 278**

DIPLOMA OF TEACHING

MOUNT LAWLEY COLLEGE OF ADVANCED EDUCATION



Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century Western Australia



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D.MARKEY

Historical Geography
of Early Nineteenth Century

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DAMAGED

For their assistance in the rigorous preparation of this work I would like to express my gratitude to Mr Lyall Hunt, Head of the Department of Social Sciences; Mr Tony Knight, External Studies Division and Mr Murray Print, Department of Social Sciences. Their encouragement, guidance and editorial assistance have played a vital role in the production of this book.

D.C.M.

NOTES

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II For purposes of authenticity and accuracy, the original currency (Sterling) has been retained. As a guide to the reader, however, the following information may be of assistance.

COMPARATIVE VALUES

| | COMMODITIES | | 1837 | 1975. |
|----------|-----------------------|-----------|----------|--------|
| Labour: | Unskilled | per day | 5s to 7s | \$25 * |
| | Skilled | per day | 10s | \$35 * |
| Food: | Flour | per pound | 4d | 30c |
| | Meat (Mutton or Beef) | per pound | 1s 4d | \$1.00 |
| | Bacon | per pound | 2s | \$1.50 |
| | Butter | per pound | 3s 6d | 75c |
| | Fish | per pound | 3d | \$1.50 |
| | Eggs | per dozen | 2s 6d | \$1.00 |
| IMPORTS: | Beer (bottles) | per dozen | 18s | \$8.40 |
| | Coffee (beans) | per pound | 1s 6d | \$1.80 |
| | Tea | per pound | 7s | 70c |
| | Sugar | per pound | 8d | 15c |

* Averaged over a five day week throughout the year.

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INTRODUCTION.

8

A new geography was made in the south west of Western Australia during the nineteenth century.

Aboriginal tribes had dwelt there in a closed and self-sufficient society for over 30,000 years. In the space of a few decades they were virtually replaced by an immigrant society that was to continue to draw people, ideas and products from overseas.

Hard on the heels of the explorers went the pastoralists, once the initial coastal outposts had been established. They created a different habitat, a combination of the old and the new. What they valued and, more importantly, what they could use from the cultural equipment of their previous habitat, they retained. But the problems of this unfamiliar land caused them quickly to adopt new attitudes and methods. Agriculture as Englishmen then knew it could not be achieved in the Swan River Colony.

Distance, isolation and an unfamiliar environment made it imperative that a new society and a new economy should be created in this new habitat. What follows attempts to describe and explain the developments that occurred during the colony's first twenty one years of existence. However, before an analysis of those early years can commence it is important to understand the nature of the subject which we are studying.

CHAPTER 1

THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

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What is historical geography?

To answer this question, one must first be clear about the nature of geography itself. Consult any number of reference works on the subject seeking a definition and you are likely to find quite a wide range of views. This is due to various factors; primarily it's because geography is both a relatively new academic discipline and also one in which sweeping changes in approaches have been going on since the mid-1950's. So significant have been the changes — sometimes called the quantitative or theoretical revolution — that references printed before this date are often considered hopelessly old fashioned by the new geographers. However, some geographers do not see recent changes as being revolutionary. They prefer to see the new developments as a logical evolutionary stage.

Whatever stand is taken, geography has become far more explicit in regard to methods and assumptions. This has been due partly to the introduction of computers which have avoided the subjective factor in the selection of facts. This more scientific approach by geographers has now led to a greater concern with the development of theories. In turn, this has meant that whereas geographers in the past were most concerned with what *is*, they can now, with some certainty talk about what *ought to be*. But, to return to the argument, what is geography itself?

Any object we may consider — be it animal, vegetable or mineral — has a nature. It also has a position in time and a position in space. The Sciences study aspects of these characteristics. The Sciences may be divided into three groups:

1.
Systematic — those that deal with particular kinds of objects, for example botany, mineralogy, biology.
2.
Historical — those that deal with objects in the context of time, for example cosmology, palaeontology, history.
3.
Geographical — those that deal with objects in the context of space, for example geography, astronomy.

Though this division may be disputed, it does at least stress what geography is primarily concerned with — objects in the context of space.

Geographers agree that geography is concerned with what occurs at, or very close to, the surface of the earth. This means that the objects of geographical enquiry are often identical with those of other sciences. Whilst pessimistic geographers might bemoan the fact that geography may seem to have no independent existence, optimists may well claim that all other sciences are branches of geography.

In practice, a selection is made of the facts to do with the surface of the earth as the home of man. Broadly speaking, geographers are concerned with both the physical environment and the cultural landscape created by man. The most fundamental geographic facts, or groups of facts, are those relating to world position, climate, landforms, soils, plants, animals, people and the political, economic and social activities of people in organised communities. Other phenomena such as religious beliefs, language and philosophical concepts may also be considered since these often find strong geographical expression.

Expressing his idea of geography in a sentence, Hartshorne, a leading 'traditional' geographer had this to say:

Geography is concerned to provide accurate, orderly and rational description and interpretation of the variable character of the earth's surface.⁽¹⁾

But there are other opinions. In discussing the geographer's tasks, a contemporary of Hartshorne's explained:

The geographer must learn about the biophysical features of the earth, is deeply interested in the interrelations between society and habitat, needs to read the cultural landscape as the earth-engraved impression of man's activity; inspects and compares distributional patterns; and formulates concepts and principles. All these means, each part of the whole, together serve the purpose of geography: to understand the earth as the world of man, with particular reference to the differentiation and integration of places.⁽²⁾

No matter how many definitions of geography are considered two fundamentals emerge: geographers are concerned with the earth as the home of man and concerned with differentiation and integration of places. The latter has been called by various geographers "the science of spatial distributions" or "the science of areal differentiation."

Whatever definition may be considered most appropriate, geographers agree that the fundamental concern is the study of places. Geographers hold in common a curiosity about places, and to them "place" includes both a piece of land and the human group that occupies it. The characteristics of different places are not only the result of "natural" factors such as relief and soil and climate but are also determined by the utilisation of these places by successive generations of inhabitants. "Art as well as Nature has gone into the making of most landscapes." (3)

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The most fundamental question asked by a geographer is "What is where?", in order to find out how things are arranged in a place. This study of distribution is of primary importance since it shows that most things are not scattered over an area at random but have a definite arrangement in space, or what is termed a "geographical pattern". This study of distribution reveals both the differences and similarities that exist between one place and another and makes the geographer aware of the individuality of a place.

It leads to the second fundamental question: "Why there?" — the question of location. Within primitive societies, incapable of manipulating their environment to any significant degree, the study of location is relatively simple. In the case of advanced cultures, the problem of location is more complex since scientific techniques have vastly increased man's ability to adapt himself and his work to his environment and to adapt his environment to his needs. Simply put, locational decisions are for modern man less restricted, because he has far greater freedom of choice among the opportunities offered him by his environment.

We have seen that geographers are primarily concerned with aspects of the location and distribution of geographic facts. It must be stressed that it is the total geographic environment that concerns them, not just facts of the physical environment. For instance, does the geographer think of Perth as a place in the lower valley of the Swan River or a place experiencing a Mediterranean climate? No! Or, at least, not exclusively. To the geographer, Perth is a town with people, a town with a particular structure or morphology and with particular functions. In other words, he sees it as a complex whole though he may elect to study particular aspects of it.

What, then, is historical geography?

It is not an attempt by geographers to explain history.

Of course this does not mean that geographical influences should not be considered in the writing of good history. As long ago as 1869, the French historian, Jules Michelet, commented on the relationship between history and geography:

Without a geographical basis, the people, the makers of history, seem to be walking on air, as in those Chinese pictures where the ground is wanting. The soil too must not be looked on only as

the scene of action. Its influence appears in a hundred ways, such as food, climate, etc. As the nest, so is the bird. As the country, so are the men.⁽⁴⁾

Peter Heylyn in 1621 had been just as definite: "Historie without Geographie like a dead carkasse hath neither life nor motion at all."⁽⁵⁾

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Historians and geographers do, however, have something in common — both are endeavouring to see patterns in a multitude of facts so that they can appreciate the world about them. But there is a fundamental difference in outlook. The world to an historian means changes that have occurred over time, to a geographer it means the surface of the earth.

If the task of the historical geographer is not to make history more meaningful, what then, is it? It is the reconstruction of past geographies; it is the study of geographical change through time. Prince sees historical geography as a means of understanding the present: "As long as geographers are concerned with the study of places and what they are like, how they differ from each other, and how their parts are inter-related, they will want to know how these places came to be what they are, and what they were like in the past."⁽⁶⁾ In other words, past geographies may help explain the present geography. Darby sees the difficulty of distinguishing between past and present: "... the geography of the present day is but a thin layer that even at this moment is becoming history ... [when does it] cease to be geography and become historical geography? Can we fix a date? Can we draw a line between geography and its history? The answer is 'No' for the process of becoming is one process. All geography is historical geography, either actual or potential."⁽⁷⁾

Much argument occurs amongst geographers as to how historical geography should be approached. To cope with the problem of analysing spatial patterns with the added problem of a time dimension, some historical geographers have adopted what is called the cross-section approach. The present is then seen as merely the most recent of an unending series of cross-sections, where cross-section is defined as the geography of a place at a particular point in time. (In practice, cross-sections tend to have a little "thickness", i.e., cover a short span of time). Each cross-section is historical geography in the sense that it is not present day geography. Each of these geographies of past periods is conceived as a geography of the historical present. By this is meant that the geography of a past period is looked at in the same manner that the geography of a place would be now in the present — the same factors are considered. In order to do this, of course, geographers have to depend on historical records for their facts. Hartshorne, when talking about geographical cross-sections makes some comparisons with the study of history itself:

If we imagine a series of air photographs taken of a single area in England, and from the same point in the air, on a mid-summer day every year during the past twenty centuries, and viewed as a motion picture film by geographers and historians, the historians would quite possibly consider it a historical picture, but certainly geographers would call it geographic. Each would see different things in the same picture. To the geographer, this would be a presentation of areal variation as it changed through time; if every individual photograph is geographic, surely the series as a whole is geographic."⁽⁸⁾

Some historical geographers, rather than dealing with cross-sections alone, link the reconstructions of past geographies with an explanation of developments that occur in between the times of the cross-sections.

This is only slightly different to what has become the most popular approach used by historical geographers today — simply the historical treatment of geographical themes. Michael Williams, an Australian historical geographer has defined this approach "as simply a way of thinking of spatial and locational questions in a time dimension, asking how things have come to be where they are, how and at what rate changes have occurred, the influence of environment, technology and society on those changes, what have been the antecedents of phenomena, and the light that the past throws on to the present."⁽⁹⁾

The essence of this approach is the concern with geographic change throughout time.

In order to measure change the historical geographer must ask these questions:

1. Delimitation of the sequence: When did it start?
2. The order of the sequence in relation to time: What followed what?
3. The order of the occurrence: Why did it happen in that sequence?
4. The timing of the sequence: Why did it occur when it did? Why did not something else occur?
5. The rate of change: How long did the entire sequence take? Were certain elements of it faster or slower than others?⁽¹⁰⁾

All of the above questions might be applied, for example, to a consideration of the evolution of the Swan Valley landscape — a consideration of its initial occupancy by aborigines, the selection of the site by European settlers and so on to the evolution of a multi-functional urban area.

Irrespective of his approach, the historical geographer depends upon various kinds of documents and records for his data and these pose a great number of problems. Ideally, the facts of the past must be: localised (a fixed position in space); well or evenly distributed in the area under consideration; and representative (the rule rather than the exception). This ideal situation seldom occurs.

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Consider the problem of investigating farming practice in an area in Western Australia in, say, the 1840's. Though documents may exist that say how much land was cropped, they seldom say where — or exactly where. Good records may exist for one part of the area but be totally lacking for other parts with which a comparison could be made. This paucity of records may be due to the illiteracy of all or some of the occupants. It might be due to other social factors. The Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in Western Australia, for example published in 1891. records evidence taken from ninety-eight witnesses. The transcript of evidence reads like a "Who's Who" of Western Australia's landed gentry at the time. Fewer than a dozen small farmers were selected as witnesses before the Commission.⁽¹¹⁾ Yet at the time small farmers easily outnumbered the large landholders. The report was based therefore, on a biased sample of the farmers of Western Australia.

These are, however, not the only problems facing the historical geographer when analysing historical data. A typical problem is that exceptional and unusual events are more frequently recorded than the commonplace. The situation is further exacerbated for the historical geographer when he is comparing sets of data which were originally amassed for different contemporary purposes.

One last problem faced by the historical geographer must be stressed. He must learn to look at the past not only from the standpoint of the present. He must also endeavour to view the past through the eyes of contemporary observers and rediscover the evaluation they made of the objects they observed. In other words he must be aware of the limitations involved in man's perception of his opportunities at a particular time, the possibilities offered by a particular environment.

CHAPTER 1. FOOTNOTES

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1. R. Hartshorne, **Perspective on the Nature of Geography**, p. 21.
2. J.O.M. Broek, **Geography : Its Scope and Spirit**, p. 79.
3. H.C. Darby, "On the Relations of History and Geography", **Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers**, No. 19, 1953, p. 646.
4. Jules Michelet in "**Histoire de France**" 1869. Quoted by Darby, p. 641.
5. Darby, p. 640.
6. C.T. Smith, "Historical Geography — Current Trends and Prospects" in R.J. Chorley and P. Haggett, (eds.) **Frontiers in Geographical Teaching**, p. 118.
7. Darby, p. 646.
8. Hartshorne, p. 103.
9. M. Williams, "Places, Periods, and Themes : A Review and Prospect of Australian Historical Geography", **The Australian Geographer**, Vol. XI, No. 111, 1970, p. 403.
10. A.R.H. Baker, (ed.) **Progress in Historical Geography**, pp. 16-17.
11. **Report of the Commission on Agriculture**, p. 19.

CHAPTER 2

THE FIRST OCCUPANCE

16

A land without people is a land without history. Without people, it may also be considered a land without geography. The period of the first occupation of a place is therefore going to be the earliest period of interest to an historical geographer.

Man himself is probably the most important agent of geographical change within historic times. This is not to deny that the physical geography of a place may change dramatically in a brief time, as a result of a violent volcanic explosion, for example, but this is uncommon and there have been no climatic changes of major significance in historic times.

The actions of man may greatly affect geographical factors such as the soil and natural vegetation of a place. This may not be significant whilst he is merely a hunter and a gatherer but major modifications begin to occur when he commences food production, or manufacturing, or trading on a large scale. (It should be noted that primitive hunters and gatherers often do trade on a small scale. Australian Aborigines engaged in limited trade in ochre and flints.) The extent of man's modification of the environment depends primarily on two things: the potential or opportunity that the place offers him and his own characteristics. Characteristics of significance will include the appraisal he makes of the resources of the place, the level of his technological development and, often, the traditions he may have acquired and brought with him from another place, similar to or different from the new environment.

The first occupants of the south west of Western Australia were the aborigines. How many were there?

Two researchers in the early days of the colony, Robert Lyon in 1832 and Francis Armstrong, the first government interpreter, in 1837, suggested that there were just over 100 aboriginal persons living in 1829 in the area now occupied as metropolitan Perth, an area now supporting over three-quarters of a million people.⁽¹⁾ By comparison, the Resident Magistrate, George M. Whitfield, listed 102 aborigines as 'residing' in the Toodyay district in 1840, but this was a particularly favourable environment.⁽²⁾

There is conflicting evidence as to how many aborigines lived in the south-west area as a whole. N. Ogle, author of *The Colony of Western Australia . . .*, published in 1839 gave a figure of one Aborigine to every two square miles, quoting Sir James Stirling as his authority.⁽³⁾ Stirling based his estimate on the number of aborigines visiting Perth from the surrounding districts that were relatively

rich in food as far as the aborigines were concerned. A much lower figure was suggested by Captain F.C. Irwin, Commandant of the colony's forces, who estimated the aboriginal density as one person to twenty square miles.⁽⁵⁾

Recent investigations have suggested that the density of Aborigines in Tasmania when Europeans arrived as permanent settlers was probably one person to every six or seven square miles,⁽⁶⁾ and this may well have been the pattern in the south west of Western Australia.

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Other factors were far more important with regard to the Aboriginal population than the density ratio, including: the actual pattern and location of Aboriginal occupation; the balance achieved between the local inhabitants and their food supply; the reaction when this balance was upset; and the actual environmental manipulation undertaken by them.

It seems most likely that the Aboriginal inhabitants were located most numerous at the precise locations that the settlers were to find most adaptable to their needs: along the coastal littoral and favourable areas on the eastern edge of the forest regions. Such places included the Swan and Murray River estuaries: Leschenault Inlet, the Vasse district, King George Sound and the Avon valley.

Aboriginal groups did not remain fixed at one spot but moved continually in their quest for food and for religious or ceremonial purposes. They travelled on well-marked tracks from one watering spot to the next. Some of these places were, in fact, carefully maintained as wells. The south-west was criss-crossed by paths "like cattle-pads and just as plain".⁽⁷⁾ Hammond records that one very well known track led from Perth to Pinjarra, thence to Kojonup and on to the Porongorups.⁽⁸⁾

Many reports exist of the willingness of Aborigines to lead explorers to their water supplies. In February, 1837, whilst on an exploratory trip from King George Sound to Perth by way of York, Surveyor Hillman and his party were directed by eight aborigines to a spring when they were in need of water.⁽⁹⁾ This spring later became the site of Kojonup.

Explorers and settlers both learned to use the native paths and soon realised that these often connected the best patches of country. It did not take long for the settlers to realise that 'good land' to the aborigines was 'good land' for them.

John Wollaston, writing in 1953 about the Champion Bay District (Geraldton) noted that:

In these parts the 'Warrang', a kind of yam, greatly abounds and grows to a large size. When roasted it is represented as superior to the potato, sweet, pleasant and nourishing. This root flourishes where the best stock feed is found. Hence the [settlers] usurpation of the ground.⁽¹⁰⁾

Hundreds of miles to the south, and some years before, in 1834, Bessie Bussell described the Vasse countryside as "a beautifully undulating grassy lawn between the huge tooart [sic] trees" and added that "kangaroos are seen in herds, which accounts for the natives being so numerous".⁽¹¹⁾

Thus the aboriginal population was concentrated near food supplies. A sequence, or life-chain, can therefore be deduced — the Aborigines occupied areas supplying food (mostly animals) — the animals sought the places with the best vegetation — and this, in turn, grew on the better soil. This was the place for which the settler looked.

There is no doubt that a delicate balance had been achieved between the Aborigines and the food producing capacity of their hunting grounds. In no area can there have been a surplus. But coming as most of them did, from the urban areas of the United Kingdom the settlers must have felt the countryside was virtually deserted. They did not realise that the original population depended totally on the environment for food with little or nothing to spare. If the settlers were to occupy places and exploit the resources they would destroy the fine ecological equilibrium that had been achieved. The shooting of the kangaroos alone would force the Aborigines to seek alternative food supplies. Since the environment gave no excess, food had to come from somewhere else, and that could only be from either the provisions or animals of the invaders. The only other alternative was for the Aborigines to starve.

Stirling had predicted "a fearful struggle between the invaders and the invaded"⁽¹²⁾ because of this fatal conflict between the two methods of environmental response:

Powerfully armed strangers, living by a careful husbandry of tamed beasts had built their farm-houses in the very centres of the natives' hunting grounds. The strangers were staking all on gaining . . . pastures on which the herds might browse and multiply in peace . . . The black spearmen alone barred an open road to success . . . There could be no compromise. Hunter or farmer must hold the land. If the hunter, the colonist must go.⁽¹³⁾

It was, of course, the hunter who had to go. In the environment where food had never been plentiful, the Aborigines watched helplessly the occupation of their best hunting grounds and the slaughter of the game they needed as food. They speared the sheep, cattle and horses of the settlers out of necessity. And so, out of necessity, the settlers made war on them.

It should be noted that the best hunting grounds often coincided with the sacred sites of the local Aborigines. These sacred sites were often found in close proximity to permanent water supplies. White settlers were also attracted to these and so barred the Aborigines' access to them.

One final factor needs to be considered in regard to the Aborigine and his environment. As an agency of geographical change, what had

his occupance achieved? Surprisingly, perhaps, since they are so often regarded as primitives unable to manipulate their environment in any significant manner, they had made it more productive than it had been before their arrival. They had done this by a process now known as "fire-stick farming" — an unsophisticated process indeed, but one consciously aimed at increasing the food production in an area.

In a planned and carefully controlled manner, the Aborigines set fire to the bush as an immediate aid to their hunting and as a guarantee of its success in the future. Backhouse noticed this occurring in the Swan area in January, 1838: "Much of the bush . . . has been recently burnt . . . The natives are now setting fire to the scrub, in various places, to facilitate their hunting and to afford young herbage to the kangaroo".⁽¹⁴⁾

Major Mitchell, an explorer in the eastern colonies, noted the effect of firing on the vegetation of New South Wales in 1848:

Fire is necessary to burn the grass and form those open forests, in which we find the large forest kangaroos; the native applies that fire to the grass at certain seasons, in order that a young green crop may subsequently spring up and so attract and enable him to kill or take the kangaroos with nets . . . But for this simple process, the Australian woods had probably contained as thick a jungle as those of New Zealand or America instead of open forests.⁽¹⁵⁾

J. Lort Stokes, an officer on H.M.S. *Beagle*, which surveyed Australian waters during 1837-1843 was one of those who noted that not only was the burning deliberate but it was also controlled:

The dexterity with which they manage so proverbially dangerous an agent as fire is indeed astonishing. Those to whom the duty is especially entrusted, and who guide or stop the running flame, are armed with large green boughs, with which, if it moves in a wrong direction, they beat it out.⁽¹⁶⁾

The settlers in the Avon valley learnt very quickly that the firing of the bush by the Aborigines was deliberate and, because of the hazard to their crops, were quick to find a solution. Within several years of settlement, by 1838, they were bribing Aborigines with gifts of wheat, rice, sugar and blankets in order to persuade them to burn-off after the harvest had been gathered.⁽¹⁷⁾

There is no doubt whatsoever that this modification of the original environment was of enormous significance to the early settlers, many of whom commented on the parklike appearance of the landscape. Perhaps the best account, and a comment on its immediate significance to the settler, was made by Lieutenant H.W. Bunbury, who was on military duty in the colony in 1836-1837:

By these fires . . . the country is kept comparatively free from underwood and other obstruction, having the character of an open forest through most parts of which one can ride freely; otherwise, in all probability, it would soon become impenetrably thick, and . . . the labour and cost of clearing would be so greatly increased as to take away all the profit, and it would change the very nature of the country, depriving it of the grazing and pastoral advantages it now possesses. This has already been proved in the case of Van Dieman's Land, where, in consequence of the transportation of the Natives to Great or Flinders Island, and the consequent absence of extensive periodical fires, the bush has grown up thick to a most inconvenient degree, spoiled the sheep runs and open pastures and afforded harbourage to snakes and other reptiles which are yearly becoming more numerous. It is true that we might ourselves burn the bush, but we could never do it with the same judgment and good effect as the Natives, who keep the fire within due bounds, only burning those parts they wish when the scrub becomes too thick or when they have any other object to gain by it.⁽¹⁸⁾

CHAPTER 2. FOOTNOTES

1. A. Hasluck, "Yanan, the Patriot", *Journal and Proceedings of the Western Australian Historical Society*, Vol. V, Part VII, 1961, p. 33. 21

2. Resident Magistrate, Toodyay, to Colonial Secretary, 2 April 1840, C.S.O. 85, Western Australian Archives, Perth.

The Western Australian Archives are hereinafter referred to as W.A.A.

3. N. Ogle, *The Colony of Western Australia : A Manual for Emigrants to that Settlement or its Dependencies*, p. 62.

4. J. Backhouse, who visited Perth in 1838, wrote: "It seems probable that the Aborigines, residing in different localities, within about seventy miles of Perth, and occasionally resorting thither, may amount to about one thousand".

J. Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, p. 547.

5. F.C. Irwin, *The State and Position of Western Australia; Commonly Called the Swan River Settlement*, p. 39.

Irwin estimated that the number of Aborigines in the south-west did not exceed one thousand: Ogle estimated the Aboriginal population as ten thousand. It is interesting to note, therefore, this comment from Trollope who visited the area in 1872:

It is calculated that in the settled districts of the colony there are at present about three thousand aborigines, including men, women and children. That the number is decreasing very quickly there is no doubt . . . Their doom is to be exterminated; and the sooner that their doom be accomplished — so that there be no cruelty — the better it will be for civilisation.

P.D. Edwards and R.B. Joyce, *Anthony Trollope : Australia*, p. 564.

6. R. Jones, "The Demography of Hunters and Farmers in Tasmania", in D.J. Mulvaney and J. Golson, (eds.) *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia*, p. 281.

7. J.E. Hammond, *Winjan's People : The Story of the South-West Australian Aborigines*, p. 18.

8. Hammond, p. 19.

9. M. Bignell, *First The Spring : A History of the Shire of Kojonup, Western Australia*, p. 1.

10. Rev. Canon A. Burton, (ed.) *Wollaston's Albany Journals, 1848 - 1856*, p. 144.

11. Quoted in E.O.G. Shann, *Cattle Chosen*, p. 97.

12. Ogle, p. 54.

13. Shann, 108-9.

14. Backhouse, p. 541.

15. Lieut.-Col. Sir T.L. Mitchell, **Journal of an Expedition into the Interior of Tropical Australia in Search of a Route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria**, pp. 412-3.

16. J.L. Stokes, **Discoveries in Australia; With an Account of the Coasts and Rivers Explored and Surveyed during the Voyage of H.M.S. "Beagle" in the years 1837 - 1843**, p. 228.

22 17. Resident Magistrate, Toodyay, in Annual Report to Colonial Secretary 1839, C.S.O. 74, W.A.A.

18. Lieut.-Col. W. St. Pierre Bunbury and W.P. Morrell, (eds.) **Early Days in Western Australia being the Letters and Journals of Lieut. H.W. Bunbury, 21st Fusiliers**, pp. 105-6.

CHAPTER 3

THE EUROPEAN APPRAISAL OF NEW HOLLAND

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By the beginning of the seventeenth century the Portugese had been replaced by the Dutch as the main traders in the area then known as the East Indies or the Spice Islands. They established a trading headquarters at Batavia in Java. The first Dutch contact with Australia came when William Jansz was sent to explore the coast of New Guinea in March, 1606. He coasted the southern shores of New Guinea, crossed Torres Strait and discovered Cape York, going as far as Cape Keerweer. Since no possibility of trade was discovered, this voyage was not followed up by further exploration. The next Dutch contact was to come from a different direction.

At that time the Dutch reached the Spice Islands by either of two routes taken once the Cape of Good Hope had been rounded: by sailing between Africa and Madagascar, the old Portugese route, and then swinging east across the Indian Ocean or by passing to the east of Madagascar towards Mauritius and then sailing in a north-easterly direction across the Indian Ocean. Neither route was completely satisfactory. Each was dangerous because of the treacherous currents around the Madagascar coast and each was slow because ships either met head-on the off shore monsoons from India during the southern hemisphere summer, or were forced to sail with the dominant south easterlies on their starboard quarter in winter.

In 1611 Hendrik Brouwer devised a new route. After rounding the Cape he sailed 4,000 miles due east at about latitude 36°S , assisted by the prevailing Westerlies.⁽¹⁾ He then turned north at about longitude 110°E and so to Java. Not only was the route faster because of the following winds but it was also shorter.⁽²⁾

From 1613 this new route became obligatory for Dutch East India Company ships sailing to Batavia. And since at that time the means of determining longitude were inaccurate it was virtually inevitable that a Dutch ship would reach the west coast of Australia one day by accident.⁽³⁾

It happened in 1616. Dirk Hartog reached Shark Bay. The island on the west of the bay was named after him and the coast in the vicinity after his ship, the *Eendracht*. Two Dutch ships, the *Zeewolf* and the *Mauritius* sighted the coast a little further south (21°S approximately) in 1618.

In 1619, in command of a fleet of eleven ships, Frederik de Houtman, reached the coast and named the rocky islands there after himself. The term *Abrolhos* is a contraction of a Portugese expression meaning "Open your eyes". The coastline between Shark

Bay and Champion Bay was named Edel's Land after a supercargo on one of the ships, Jacob D'edel. In 1622 Cape Leeuwin and the coast eastwards almost to King George Sound were discovered and Arnhem Land was seen in the following year. The Guldz Seepaerd sighted the south coast near Cape Leeuwin in 1627 and sailed eastwards along the Great Australian Bight, naming it Nuyts Land after an official on board.

A major expedition led by Abel Tasman in 1642 discovered land he called Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania) and the west coast of New Zealand which he took to be part of the Great South Land. On a second expedition in 1644 he filled in much of the Western Australian coastline naming it Nova Hollandia (New Holland). By the end of 1644, then, the Dutch had mapped the Australian coastline from Cape York Peninsula westwards and around to the Great Australian Bight.

In 1656, De Vergulde Draeck (The Gilt Dragon) was wrecked on a reef on the west coast at latitude $30^{\circ}40'S$ with the loss of many lives. Rescue ships that year and the next failed to re-locate the treasure. In 1658, on a similar mission, the Waebende Boey' (The Watch Buoy) commanded by Samuel Volckertszoon failed also but made better charts of the coastline of the area. Volckertszoon landed near the Swan River and noted that:

The South-land has sandy dunes forming many points of the sea-side; the dunes all consist of loose sand overgrown with grass into which a man will sink up to his ankles, and leave deep footprints on withdrawing his feet . . . Inward the land is pretty high, with hills of even height, but barren and wild to look at, except near the island, where a great many trees are seen.

In slightly under $32^{\circ}S$ latitude there is a large island, at about 3 miles distance from the mainland of the South-land; this island has high mountains, with a good deal of brushwood and many thornbushes, so that it is hard to go over; here certain animals are found, since we saw many excrements, and besides two seals and a wild cat, resembling a civet-cat, but with brown hair. This island is dangerous to touch at, owing to the rocky reefs which are level with the water and below the surface, almost along the whole length of the shore; between it and the mainland there are also numerous rocks and reefs, and slightly more to southward there is another small island.⁽⁴⁾

Few further Dutch contacts were made until nearly the end of the century.

In 1696 Commander Willem de Vlaming, with three ships under his command, was ordered to examine the New Holland coastline for a long overdue Dutch ship. Vlaming was to be the first European to set eyes on the Swan River and to make careful observations of the nature of the landscape. He was to leave quite unimpressed.

On 29 December, 1696, Vlaming's ships had anchored off an island which was explored and named Rottenest (Rottnest) because of the number of rats' (wallabies) nests found upon it:

The ground is covered with little or no soil, but chiefly with white and rocky sand, in my opinion little adapted for cultivation. There are very few birds there and no animals, except a kind of rat as big as a common cat, whose dung is found in abundance all over the island. There are also very few seals or fish, except a sort of sardine and grey rock bream.⁽⁵⁾

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On 5 January, 1697 a landing was made on the coast, probably several miles north of the mouth of the Swan River.⁽⁶⁾ The party of eighty-six men pushed inland and reached the river. Here, on the banks, they found a hut "of a worse description than that of a Hottentot", but no other sign of inhabitants other than some footprints in the sand. They stayed for more than a week exploring in all directions but no Aborigines were sighted at this spot. The river was explored for sixteen miles or so and named the Swaenerevier (Swan River) after the black swans that frequented it. Vlaming left on January 13 and sailed northwards having found "neither good country nor seen anything of note". His final report spoke disparagingly of the coastline as a whole:

Generally speaking with respect to the South Land . . . nothing has been discovered but a barren, bare, desolate region; at least along the coast and so far as we have penetrated into the interior. Neither have we met with any signs of habitation, some fires excepted, and a few naked black men, supposed to have been seen on two or three occasions at a distance . . . Neither again were any remarkable animals or birds observed, except principally in the Swan River, a species of black swans . . .⁽⁷⁾

It is significant that the report contained nothing to suggest that the Swan River was suitable as a place for either trade (with whom would they trade?), exploitation or settlement.

The last recorded Dutch visit of this period was in 1765.

Meanwhile an Englishman had sighted New Holland. He had come first in 1688 as a member of the mutinous crew of the *Cygnet* to the west Kimberley coast:

The fourth day of January 1688 we fell in with the land of New Holland in the latitude of 16°50' . . . This part of it that we saw is all low even land, with sandy banks against the sea, only the points are rocky, and so are some of the islands in this bay.

The land is of dry sandy soil, destitute of water, except you make wells; yet producing diverse sorts of trees: but the woods are not thick, nor the trees very big . . . There was pretty long grass growing under the trees, but it was very thin. We saw no trees that bore fruit or berries.

We saw no sort of animals, nor any track of beast, but once, and that seemed to be the tread of a beast as big as a great mastiff dog. Here are a few small land birds, but none bigger than a blackbird, and but few sea fowls. Neither is the sea very plentifully stored with fish, unless you reckon the manatee and turtle as such. Of these creatures there is plenty, but they are extraordinary shy though the inhabitants cannot trouble them much, having neither boats nor iron. The inhabitants of this country are the miserablest people in the world. The Hodmadods of Monomatapa, though a nasty people, yet for wealth are gentlemen to these; who have no houses and skin garments, sheep, poultry, and fruits of the earth, ostrich eggs, etc., as the Hodmadods have; and setting aside their human shape, they differ but little from brutes. They are tall, straight-bodied and thin, with small, long limbs. They have a great head, round foreheads, and great brows. Their eye-lids are always half closed, to keep the flies out of the eyes, they being so troublesome here that no fanning will keep them from coming to one's face; and without the assistance of both hands to keep them off, they will creep into one's nostrils, and mouth, too, if the lips are not shut very close.⁽⁸⁾

Dampier's impressions of the coast were distinctly unfavourable yet when his book *A New Voyage Round the World* was published so much interest was aroused in official circles that he was sent back in command of H.M.S. *Roebuck* to make further investigations. This time his report was even more unfavourable. He landed first at Shark Bay on 1 August, 1699. Eight days were spent there searching unsuccessfully for fresh water and he sailed northwards leaving the coast at Roebuck Bay in September having seen nothing to make him change his mind about either the land or its inhabitants. His reports stressed the extreme sterility and aridity of the coastal country and the wretchedness of the inhabitants. British interest in New Holland lapsed for the time being.

It was not until nearly the end of the eighteenth century, almost one hundred years later, that British exploration recurred in New Holland. In 1791, Captain George Vancouver carefully surveyed the south coast, discovering and naming King George Sound. On 29 September, he formally took possession, then sailed away. The coast was visited again in 1801 by Mathew Flinders in H.M.S. *Investigator* on his way to Sydney.

Two French ships, *La Recherche* and *L'Esperance* under the command of Captain D'Entrecasteaux had investigated the southern coast only a year after Vancouver and more arrived in 1801. They were an expedition of three ships: *Geographe* under Baudin, *Naturaliste* under Hamelin and *Casuarina* under Freycinet. They remained several years, exploring the coast with much thoroughness. They carried with them experts in several fields including M. Leschenault, a noted botanist, M. Francois Peron, a zoologist and M. Bailley, a mineralogist.

Between 17 and 22 June, 1801, the Swan River was explored under the leadership of M. Heirisson. Mount Eliza was climbed and the view was described as striking and beautiful. The Canning River was named the Moreau Inlet after a member in the party. The fertility of the soil near Guildford was noted as significant. The expedition examined almost all the coastline of Western Australia, before its departure in 1803.

In 1818 Freycinet returned and explored the western and north-western coasts.

During the period 1818-1822 Lieutenant King, first in the *Mermaid* and then the *Bathurst* surveyed much of the coast, drawing up charts for the Admiralty. With him sailed the botanist Cunningham and a junior officer John Septimus Roe, destined to become the Swan River Colony's first Surveyor General.

In 1825 French ships, the *Thetis* and *L'Esperance* under de Bouganville operated along the southern coast. It was their presence that induced Governor Darling of New South Wales to make the hasty decision to establish the British settlement at King George Sound in 1826. So the first British settlement had been established in New Holland!

For two hundred and ten years the coast of New Holland had been known by Europeans. Why had it taken such a long time for a settlement to be established?

The basic reason was that there was nothing to encourage a settlement because there was nothing to trade.

Each year hundreds of ships, like birds, glided from Europe to hotter lands to fill themselves with food and materials which Europe could not produce. As late as the eighteenth century, however, they shunned Australia. That land seemed to grow no bush or flower or grain which Europe wanted. It seemed to yield no precious metal or mineral. It produced no animal or fish for which European merchants were willing to risk their ships in long voyages.⁽⁹⁾

Despite the frequent landings on the western coast from 1616 onwards not one valuable commodity for the markets of Europe had been discovered. Not only was the distance of Australia from Europe great, but so also were the risks attached to sailing at that time. Therefore any trade commodity would have had to be a valuable one, a luxury. And at that time no such commodity existed. The coast was not even considered valuable as a port of call for supplies and repairs for one had been established at the Cape by the Dutch in 1652 and they considered the distance from there to the Indies too short to warrant another on the route.

By the second decade of the nineteenth century the situation had changed in regard to Terra Australis. The British were established

on the east coast and feared the encroachment of any other European nation. When, in 1826, the French sent an expedition under the command of D'Urville to explore both in Australian and New Zealand waters there was an immediate reaction from the British government. This was the cause of the first British settlement in what was to become Western Australia.

On 1 March, 1826, Earl Bathurst, Secretary of State for colonies, wrote to Darling, Governor of New South Wales, ordering him to act to forestall the possibility of a French settlement on the west coast: "... you will endeavour to procure accurate information respecting the Country immediately adjoining to Sharks Bay, situated on the Western side of New Holland in Latitude 25°30' South, Longitude 114° East".⁽¹⁰⁾ He ordered also that a settlement be established at Western Port and indicated that more than one base on the west coast might be needed because:

The sailing of Two French Ships on a Voyage of discovery have led to the consideration how far our distant possessions in the Australian Seas may be prejudiced by any designs, which the French may entertain of establishing themselves in that quarter.⁽¹¹⁾

Ten days later Bathurst countermanded his instructions in regard to Sharks Bay and ordered instead an investigation of King George Sound:

In order that if the Soil should be found good (that around Sharks Bay being by every information extremely barren) and if the circumstances of the place be in other respects favourable, a settlement may be first made in that quarter. Among other advantages which it is understood to possess, it has that of lying in the tract of Vessels from England, and by that means enjoys an easy communication with Port Jackson.⁽¹²⁾

Governor Darling wrote back: "I am informed that the Country around both Sharks Bay and King George Sound is perfectly barren and destitute of vegetation. The French would, therefore, find it difficult to maintain themselves at either of these places."⁽¹³⁾ Nevertheless, he went ahead with the King George Sound settlement. The concern the Governor felt in regard to French intentions was highlighted in the opening sentence of his secret instructions given to Major Lockyer, commander of the King George Sound expedition:

As the French Discovery Ships, which are understood to have been preparing for these Seas, may possibly have in view the Establishment of a Settlement on some part of the coast of this Territory, which has not yet been colonised by us, I think it necessary to apprise you, confidentially, of what may possibly be their object.⁽¹⁴⁾

Was it really a fear of French settlement that prompted this attitude or was it from a sense of sea strategy? The second possibility seems likely as Major Lockyer reported:

The importance of King George Sound as a place necessary to occupy must strike every person acquainted with this Country. An enemy holding it would with its cruisers completely intercept and greatly annoy the trade . . . to Van Dieman's Land and Port Jackson from Europe, the Cape of Good Hope, Isle of France and India.⁽¹⁵⁾

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In this way the first settlement, in what was to be Western Australia, was established not for trade, not for the production of any particular crops, but either to prevent a possible French settlement or at least to guard the existing British interests and trading routes.

The motives for the next settlement in Western Australia were to be very different.

CHAPTER 3. FOOTNOTES

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1. **Western Australian Year Book**, No. 13, 1974, p. 1.

Unless otherwise specified, statements of fact in this chapter come from this source, pp. 1-10.

2. Meridians of longitude are closer together the further one moves away from the equator.

3. At this time the compass was an accurate enough instrument and so the Dutch mariners could steer directly east and check their latitude (the angular distance from the equator) by means of an instrument called an astrolabe. By sighting the sun at midday with this sextant-like instrument the latitude of the locality could be calculated. The chronometer had not yet been invented and, since there was no other reasonably accurate instrument to measure time, it was almost impossible to calculate longitude. That could only be done by knowing how far the vessel had travelled. An estimate had to be made based on the ship's speed which was measured by trailing a knotted rope over the ship's stern. Problems arose when winds were variable or stormy and were complicated further when latitude could not be calculated due to a cloudy midday, or a succession of them, a quite frequent occurrence at this latitude in winter.

4. J.E. Heeres, **The Part Born by the Dutch in the Discovery of Australia, 1606 - 1765**, p. 79.

Where did he land?

Rottneest Island lies at latitude 32°S exactly, but it is not three miles off the mainland and neither is Carnac nor Garden Island.

5. R.H. Major, **Early Voyages to Terra Australis, Now Called Australia**, p. 121.

6. As near as can be estimated, the position was between the present Leighton and Cottesloe beaches, on the spot where the Vlaming Memorial now stands.

7. Major, pp. 114-5.

8. W. Dampier, **A New Voyage Round the World**, Vol. 3, pp. 462-4.

9. G. Blainey, **The Tyranny of Distance**, p. 2.

10. **Historical Records of Australia**, Series I, Vol. XII, p. 193.

11. p. 194.

12. p. 218.

13. p. 640.

14. p. 701.

15. Blainey, p. 91.

CHAPTER 4

STIRLING'S VISIT: A REAPPRAISAL

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On 9 November, 1826 two Colonial Government brigs, *Dragon* and *Amity* sailed, under escort by H.M.S. *Fly*, from Sydney to establish settlements at Western Port and King George Sound. The *Amity* reached King George Sound on 25 December, 1826 and the settlement was established on the following day.⁽¹⁾

Ten days after the brigs and their escort left, H.M.S. *Success*, under the command of Captain James Stirling, sailed into Sydney Harbour. He had been sent from England to undertake the removal of the settlement of Fort Dundas at Melville Island to a more favourable location. This outpost in Australia's north had been established at the request of the East India Company as a trading post with the Malays.⁽²⁾ Convicts and a garrison had been sent from Sydney.

Several days after the arrival of H.M.S. *Success*, the French man-of-war *L'Astrolabe* under the command of Captain Dumont D'Urville sailed into Sydney harbour, fresh from a voyage along the southern coast. D'Urville had actually landed at both King George Sound and Western Port prior to the arrival of their respective British garrisons.

The *Astrolabe* had called at Sydney to refit and resupply in the course of a long voyage, the main object of which was said to be scientific research. Governor Darling was not convinced and wrote to Bathurst:

Captain D'Urville would lead me to believe that the object of his expedition is solely for the purpose of general science. It is perhaps a fortunate event that he has found His Majesty's Ships *Warspite*, *Success* and *Volage* lying here, knowing at the same time that the *Fly* has sailed with an Expedition to the Southward, as he may in consequence be more circumspect in his proceeding that he otherwise would have been.⁽³⁾

During his seventeen day stay, D'Urville dined on board the *Success* with Stirling. Though no record exists of the topics of conversation, it seems possible that by some means Stirling was prompted to consider the vast empty coastline with its unknown and mainly uncharted harbours on the west coast. No Englishman had explored the coast between Cape Leeuwin and Shark Bay – but the French had!

Whatever was discussed between Stirling and D'Urville cannot be determined, but even before the Frenchman had sailed from Sydney, Stirling had sent a letter to Governor Darling suggesting that he be permitted to examine the Swan River area and assess its potential for

settlement. He noted that it would be convenient for him to do this since the settlement at Melville Island could not be shifted to Croker's Island until the monsoon season had ended. In this long despatch, dated 14 December, 1826, he noted "certain Ideas have been suggested to me by Professional observation, relative to the necessity of immediately Seizing upon a position on the Western Coast of this Island near Swan River, in the 32nd Degree of Latitude".⁽⁴⁾ Although he had not visited the area he then went on to comment on the many advantages for settlement of the Swan River. He stressed the commercial and strategic advantages for England of such a settlement, advantages that were not possessed by Sydney because of its location. His ignorance of geography and of climate in particular, was demonstrated when he talked of the climate that might be expected; but he was no more ignorant than most people in this regard at that time.

Your Excellency is aware that the coast, between Cape Leeuwin and Shark's Bay, has never been explored by any British Officer;⁽⁵⁾ its Soil and Productions are as yet unknown; but, as it is situated in the same parallel as New South Wales, in the same climate and on the same Island, it is fair to assume that it is in other respects similar to this country; if this assumption be correct, it will admit of labour by Europeans, and produce commodities well suited to the wants of neighbouring countries, which being situated between Tropics are in a condition to exchange Tropical productions for those of the Temperate Zone; it might, for instance, supply India with Horses and Wheat, and possibly Coal and Iron; it might supply the Mauritius with Live Stock and Grain; it might supply the Malay Islands with various articles, adapted to their wants, and China with Wool, Hemp, Shipping, and the produce of the Ocean. With reference to its Productions generally, I do not think it too much to say that it may hereafter be to the various Countries in India that which the Colonies in North America once were to the West Indian Settlements.⁽⁶⁾

Stirling then returned to the theme of a strategic location:

The troops and Seamen, moreover, would there be situated in a healthy and bracing Climate, and be constantly kept in condition to pour upon any Surrounding Country, either for the Annoyance of an Enemy's Settlements, or the protection of our own.⁽⁷⁾

Mindful of the British government's concern with economy at this time, Stirling made a persuasive plea in regard to the costs of such a settlement:

It does not appear that the expense of maintaining a settlement in that position would be great; all the Necessaries of life in its Infancy might be obtained cheaply from Timor or Java; the

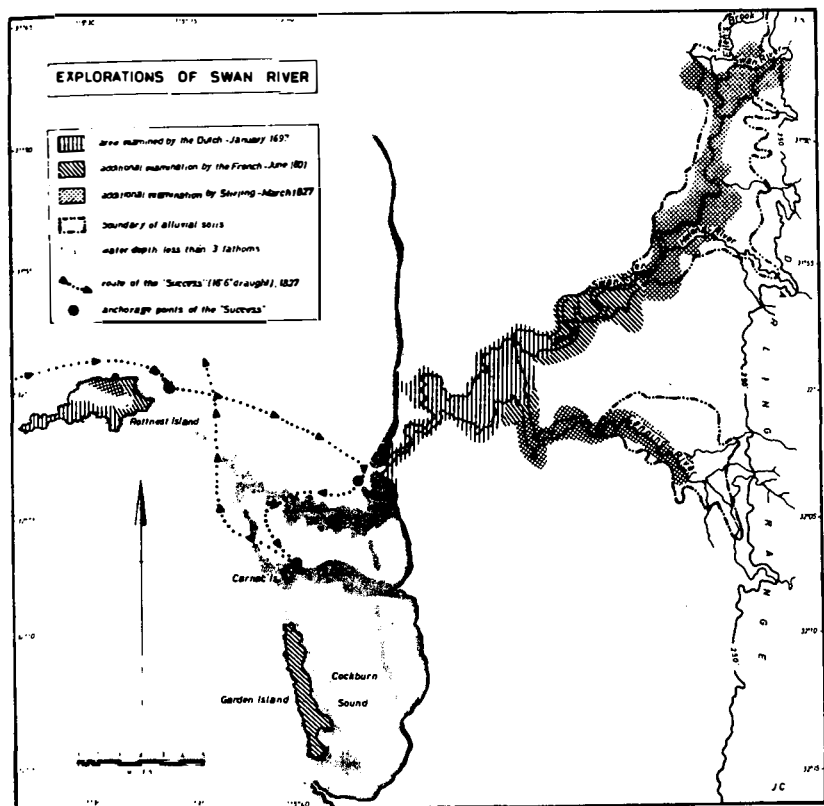


Figure 1 Explorations of Swan River

Source: H.R.A., III, vi, pp.551-84; Peron and Freycinet, 1807, vol. 1, pp.178-84; Major, 1859, pp.112-33.

Convalescent Troops and Ships from India might be its Guard; the China ships would convey stores from England at a low rate,⁽⁸⁾ or Prisoners, if it were thought proper to make it a Penal Settlement; and a very few Years would render it in all probability fit to maintain itself.⁽⁹⁾

In concluding his despatch, Stirling turned to the question of the possibility of a foreign occupation on the western coast:

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Finally, Sir, at a time when we have one French Vessel of War in these areas with objects not clearly understood, and when we hear of an American Vessel of War being also in this neighbourhood, seeking a place for a Settlement, it becomes important to prevent them from occupying a position of such Value, particularly as you were pleased to say that His Majesty's Government is desirous of not being anticipated in such views by any Foreign Power.⁽¹⁰⁾

Stirling had firmly recommended a British settlement on the west coast. He'd made a strong case for the settlement being located at Swan River as opposed to the other sites he felt would be competitors with his selection; for Shark Bay was too hot for labour by Europeans and King George Sound, though able to guard trade routes to the earlier colonies, did not lie on the route of the very important China trade.

What was Darling's reaction? Stirling was given a commission to undertake the exploration he had suggested. Ironically, Darling's report to Bathurst went from Sydney by the same ship that carried D'Urville's accounts of his voyages so far, along with cases of specimens, to the French Ambassador in London.⁽¹¹⁾ Darling informed Bathurst that though he could not vouch for the accuracy of Stirling's arguments it was "of great importance that so advantageous a position" should not be taken possession of by the French.⁽¹²⁾

On 17 January, 1827, Stirling sailed from Sydney in the *Success* taking with him Mr Charles Fraser, the Colonial Botanist of New South Wales. He was to return three months later with glowing reports of what he had seen.

In a recent article: "Prelude to Colonisation: James Stirling's Examination of Swan River, March 1827", J.M.R. Cameron has carefully analysed the criteria for examination used by Stirling and the results of their application.⁽¹³⁾

STIRLING'S EXAMINATION⁽¹⁾

When the *Success* anchored off Rottnest Island on 5 March 1827, Stirling had two criteria to satisfy if his proposal to settle the area was to be considered. He had to demonstrate that a large, safe harbour existed and that there was sufficient fertile land to ensure a sizable and stable colony.⁽²⁾ He wasted no time in attempting to do so. On 6 March, the *Success* was moved inshore, the master was sent to sound the approaches to Carnac island and Stirling

made a short sortie of five or six miles up the river. On the following day, the *Success* was moved to its permanent anchorage near Carnac Island and the survey of Cockburn Sound was commenced. From 8 March to 16 March, Stirling, Fraser and 16 others explored the Swan River as far as its junction with Ellen's Brook, just below its exit from the Darling Range. A smaller party also made a brief survey of the Canning River. The full extent of these examinations and the nature of their commentary is shown in Figure 2. The remaining five days were spent completing the survey of Cockburn Sound and examining Garden Island and, on 22 March, the *Success* sailed slowly southwards. Two days were spent exploring Geographe Bay. By 2 April, the ship was anchored in King George Sound. It arrived back in Sydney on 15 April 1827.

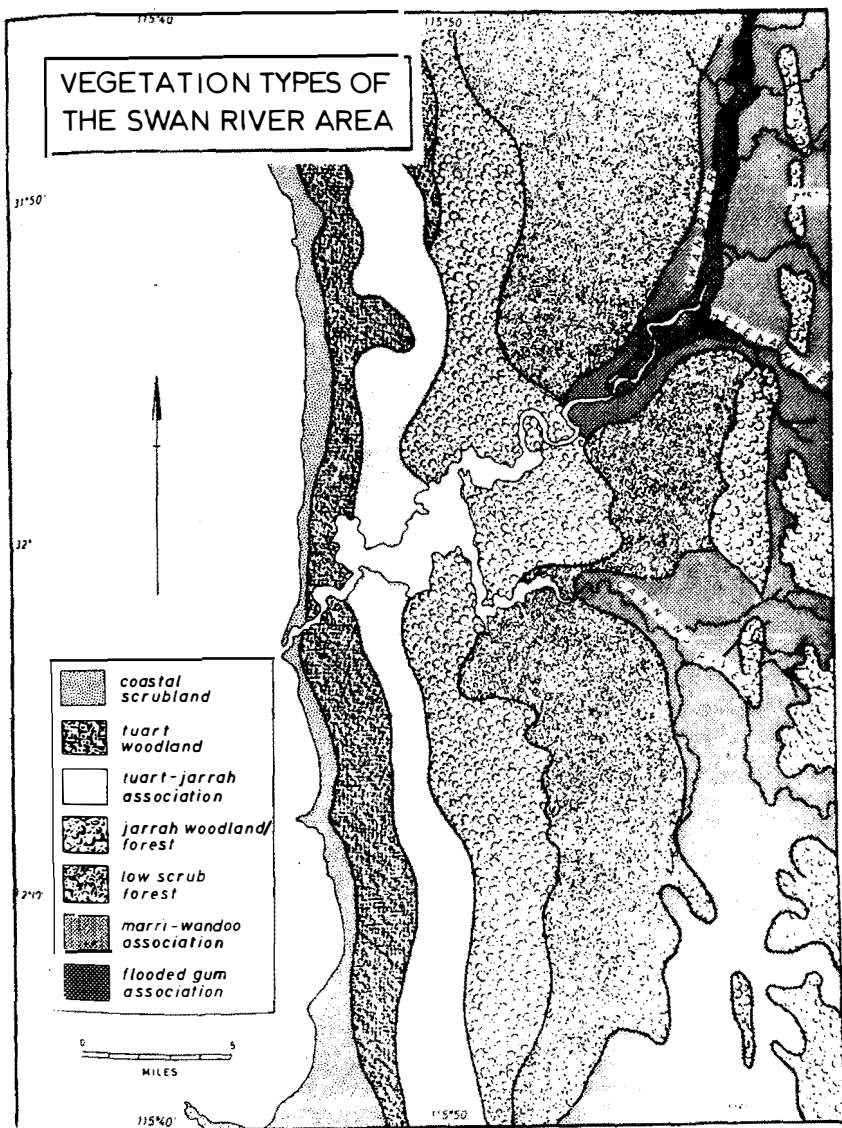
The *Success* had been away for a total of 89 days. Only sixteen of these had been spent in the Swan River area and a further seven between Rottnest Island and Cape Leeuwin. Noting this and the obvious jubilation of the crew, Marnie Bassett has described the affair as a 'picnic episode' and observed that it was a very flimsy basis for founding a colony.⁽³⁾ There is some justification for this, but while Stirling spent little more time than either the Dutch or French at Swan River, he used it intensively for the solution of specific objectives. It should also be noted that this examination was considerably more detailed and far reaching than any other preceding the formation of an Australian colony (Figure 2).

The examination was certainly fortuitous. The *Success* narrowly missed running aground on several occasions (Figure 1). Of the nine days spent exploring the river, six were spent above Heirisson Island in the fertile alluvial triangle. In fact, the area of most intensive examination was at the junction of the Swan River with Ellen's Brook which is now the most favoured vine-growing area in Western Australia. The climate during their stay was exceptionally mild. Day time temperatures were never high and were always moderated by an early afternoon sea breeze.

Criteria for Evaluation

Stirling, acknowledging Fraser's great expertise, left the bulk of the detailed assessment to him, being content to judge the general character of the country only.⁽⁴⁾ The similarity of his conclusions with Fraser's suggests close co-operation and that he was strongly influenced by Fraser's judgement.

Stirling only occasionally directed attention to soils. More commonly, he described the vegetation, but, in neither instance, were his comments specific. For example, he recorded of the alluvial lands below the junction of the Swan and Helena Rivers: "The Plants, which inhabit sandy districts, were becoming rare,



Vegetation types of the Swan River area. Source: Speck, 1952.

while those which flourish in Loamy soils, were frequently appearing."⁽⁵⁾ Generally, however, his evaluations were based on aesthetic criteria. Vegetation which was "unpleasant to the eye" indicated poor soil while he noted that scenic beauty increased simultaneously with improvement in soils.⁽⁶⁾ He was attracted to several tree species, particularly the peppermints and the Swan River Cypress, believing that the beauty of the river banks "is enhanced by the lotty trees, which occasionally adorn them and by the bright green foliage with which the shrubs are covered."⁽⁷⁾ Variety of foliage and soil colour, as well as relief, added much to the quality of the landscape. The openness of the forest added to his visual enjoyment while suggesting that the area would be easy to clear and move through. The beauty of the river, which he recognized as having an important role as a transport link, framed the whole scene and he paid considerable attention to it in his description.

Fraser was conscious of the beauty of the area and responsive to aesthetic aspects but, unlike Stirling, used several specific criteria including soils, vegetation and variety of relief in his assessment. The distinction between these is not clear cut, however, as he frequently used a combination rather than individual elements. He also concentrated on those elements with which he had the greatest familiarity, particularly vegetation types. Implicit in his evaluation is a clearly ranked order of fertility (Table 1).

Soils were initially classified by grain size into sands, earths, loams and alluvial.⁽⁸⁾ In a few areas at the base of the Darling Scarp, Fraser also distinguished gravels. These major soil types were further sub-divided on the basis of colour so that the term 'barren sands' was applied to the whitish sands of the calcareous dunes, while the deeper yellow and grey sands of the inland dunes were simply called 'sands'. Grey sands with a darker colouring through the profile were termed 'virgin earths'. A full colour range from light to dark red through light brown to 'richest brown' was used to differentiate loamy soils. Alluvial soils were considered to be of equally high fertility, although Fraser considered that areas with less vegetative cover had more value because they could more quickly be brought into production. Soil depth was used as a further criterion of fertility, being mainly applied to loams of similar colour and texture.

Vegetation was often used to confirm an assessment of soil quality. So, for example, Fraser recorded of the coastal dunes: "The appearance of the *Gnaphalium* . . . is in some measure confirmatory of the sandy character which the French gave of this hills."⁽⁹⁾ Frequently, however, it was used as an alternative. The major types and their corresponding soils are listed in Table 1.

TABLE I
CHARLES FRASER'S SOIL CLASSIFICATION
SWAN RIVER MARCH 1827
 (arranged in increasing order of soil fertility)

Soil Group

| | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|--|
| Sands | barren sand sand | <i>Gnaphalium (Calocephalus brownii)*</i> <i>Banksia, Angophora (Eucalyptus calophylla)</i> |
| Earths | fine virgin earth | <i>Callitris (c. preissii), Agonis (A. Flexuosa)</i> |
| Loams | sandy loam | <i>Banksia grandis</i> , stunted eucalyptus <i>(Eucalyptus marginata)</i> |
| | red sandy loam | <i>Hakea spp.</i> |
| | light red loam | Stringy bark <i>(Eucalyptus marginata)</i> |
| | rich red loam | <i>Angophora (Eucalyptus calophylla),</i> <i>Xanthorrhoea spp.</i> |
| | fine light brown loam | <i>Acacia (Acacia cyanophylla)</i> |
| Loams | richest brown loam | <i>Brome grass (Danthoria spp.)</i> |
| | | <i>Bastard gum (Eucalyptus rudis)</i> |
| | | <i>Blue gum (Eucalyptus redunca var.</i> |
| | | <i>elata)</i> |
| | | <i>Brome grass (Danthonia spp.)</i> |
| Alluvials | alluvium | <i>Bastard gum (Eucalyptus rudis)</i> |
| | | <i>Metrosideros (Melaleuca raphiophylla)</i> |
| | | <i>Acacia (Acacia diptera)</i> |

* Current botanical name is shown in parentheses where this differs from Fraser's terminology.

Source: H.R.A., III, vi, pp.578-84; Hay, 1906, pp.6-19; S.G., 18.4.1827.

Frequent use was made of high vantage points to examine areas not directly covered by his traverse and here vegetation was the sole criterion.⁽¹⁰⁾ He willingly admitted to being perplexed by the character of the vegetation, however, as relationships established in New South Wales did not appear to be valid:

It is worthy of remark that, in New South Wales, the presence of *Banksia*, *Zamia* and *Xanthorrhoea* are considered sure criterions of bad soil; and such being the impression on my mind, I pronounced all the land on which they were seen to grow to be sterile, until I examined a ridge on the banks producing them in great luxuriance, when, to my astonishment, I found the soil to be a red earth of great depth, producing the most luxuriant *Brome*⁽¹¹⁾ grass.

The great height of these three species further added to his perplexity and this, in no small measure, confirmed his opinion of the high fertility of the region. In fact, he took a 'thistle' measuring 11 feet 6 inches back to Sydney as evidence of the superior quality of the soil.⁽¹³⁾ In addition, the great floral diversity and a relief characterized by hill and dale implied that the Swan River area would support a wide variety of crops including vines and cotton.

He found the luxuriance of the vegetation in marked contrast to the 'Gverbrown' of New South Wales⁽¹⁴⁾ and used such adjectives as 'vivid', 'brilliant' and 'rich' to describe the greenness of the foliage. This luxuriance not only confirmed the fertility of the soils but was a clear indication that the country was well watered:

The very trees furnished sufficient proofs of the abundance of moisture from the uniformly vivid green appearance, whilst the vast abundance of herbaceous plants set the matter beyond a doubt.⁽¹⁵⁾

Stirling was to go ever further, claiming:

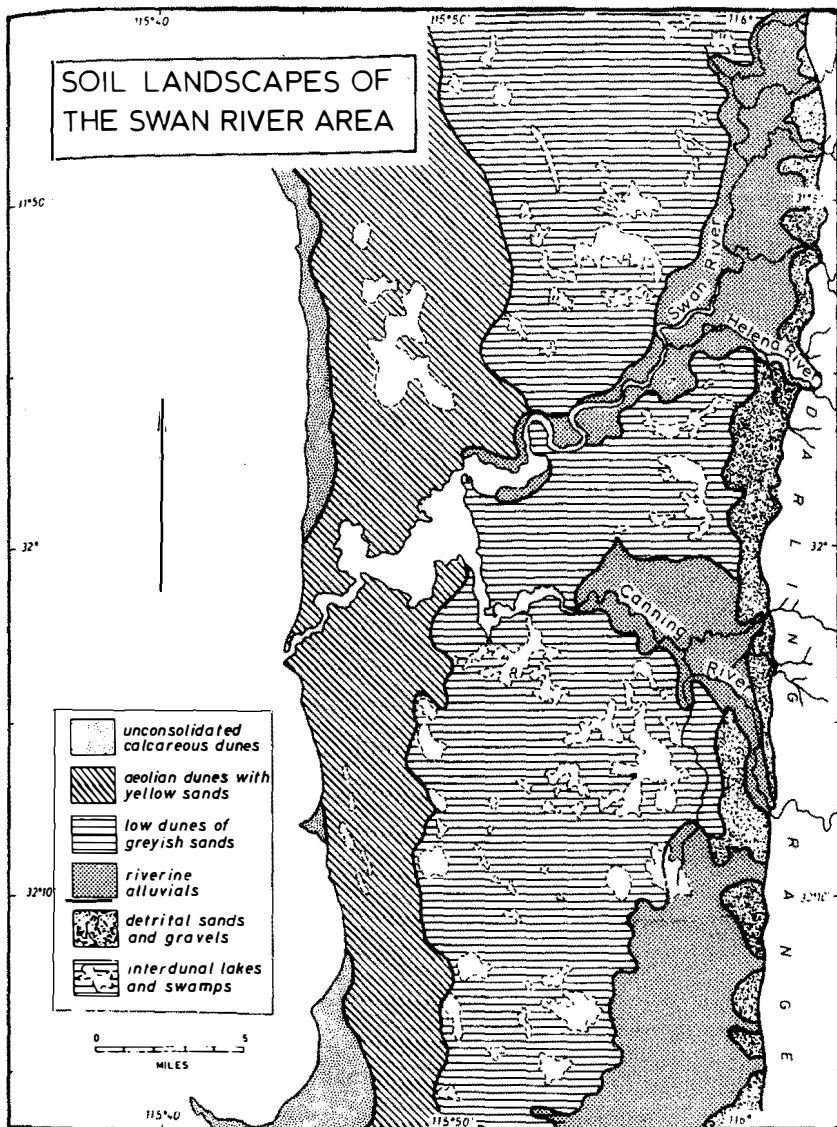
The verdant appearance and almost innumerable variety of Grasses, Plants and Trees show that there is no deficiency in the three great sources of the Sustenance, Soil, Heat, or Moisture.⁽¹⁶⁾

Thus, on the broad level, vegetation set the seal on the character of the area.

Results of the Survey

Stirling reported with obvious jubilation that former objections to the utilization of western New Holland, specifically, 'the reported Sterility of Soil, the absence of fresh Water and the impossibility of finding a safe anchorage', were completely negated by his examination.⁽¹⁷⁾ On the contrary, he found that there were at least five safe mooring points near the mouth of the Swan River while Cockburn Sound, with its extensive, protected water, was as safe as any harbour on the Australian coast.⁽¹⁸⁾ Soils near the

SOIL LANDSCAPES OF THE SWAN RIVER AREA



Soil landscapes of the Swan River area. Source: McArthur and Bettenay, 1960

river were rich, the country was well-watered and the fertile Plain of Quartania, extending from Cape Leeuwin northwards and up to 50 miles wide, was an additional and unexpected bonus.⁽¹⁹⁾

His earlier conjecture about wind patterns was confirmed and he saw no impediment to shipping.⁽²⁰⁾ Clause, the surgeon on board the *Success*, endorsed his opinion of the healthiness of the climate⁽²¹⁾ and confirmed his belief that the area had great potential as a trade and convalescent station.⁽²²⁾ He accordingly requested the government to speedily annex the area as it was the only suitable site between Shark's Bay and Cape Leeuwin.

Stirling had to confess that resources were "neither numerous nor very valuable", but he saw no reason to be alarmed at this for "the Country is more valuable for that which it might produce than for its actual productions." He came to this conclusion by transposing known facts about other countries in similar latitudes and, as in most of his arguments, climate was singled out as the most important factor.⁽²³⁾ What the future productions might be he did not specify but left it to the suggestion of analogy and the reader's imagination.⁽²⁴⁾

Not all Stirling's conclusions were based on verifiable fact. As the coldest land breezes came from the E.N.E., he concluded that 'Snowy Mountains' were situated in that direction. He considered the sea breeze to be the cause of rain. The vapour it carried was condensed by the colder air along the base of the Darling Scarp and fell as gentle showers.⁽²⁵⁾ While this may have been a reasonable assumption, no rain fell during his time at Swan River. Similarly, he believed that the ample supply of water indicated that a large river would be found over the mountain range and flowing to the north. Perhaps the most illuminating of his speculations related to coal.⁽²⁶⁾ He was convinced that the only reason coal was not discovered was that "it was not particularly sought for."⁽²⁷⁾ This suggests that his high expectations of Swan River has been fully met. In this land of plenty, everything was possible.

Of the land in general, he differentiated three broad zones:

First, the Limestone ridge of an average breadth of 3 miles on the Sea Shore, then the plain, an undulating Valley of an average breadth of 30 miles, and lastly the mountain range rising abruptly from the plain to the height of 1,200 feet and extending North and South on a line parallel with the Coast and apparently co-extensive with it. . . As the Hills are descended, the Soil improves, and, at about a Mile from their base, fragments of Rocks and large grained Quartz or Sand give place to a red loamy Soil, which gradually passes into the general average Soil of the plain.⁽²⁸⁾

It is clear from Stirling's summary of the advantages of Swan River that he had enlarged his initial conception of the importance of a colony based there. Rather than an appendage of British possessions in the Indian Ocean, it should be seen as an independent colony and an important part of Britain's much larger sphere of international activity.

Fraser's outlook, on the other hand, was more limited. He concentrated on the advantages the area held for settlers who would engage in agriculture. These were fourfold. The good soil; the open nature of the country, "a state which allows not a greater average than 10 trees to an Acre"; the abundance of springs and fresh water and, finally, the ease of sailing up-river, considerably added to the desirability of the area. He carefully stipulated, however, that these comments only applied to the area up-stream from the Swan's confluence with the Canning."⁽²⁹⁾

Within a week of Stirling's return to Sydney, Darling had written to Bathurst recommending that a settlement be established at Swan River, stressing that since Stirling's report might find its way into the French papers, no time should be lost in taking the necessary steps.⁽¹⁴⁾

Stirling now undertook the task that had brought him to Australia — the removal of the Melville Island settlement to Croker's Island. He left Sydney on 19 May, 1827, investigated the new site proposed by Bathurst, found it wanting, and located the settlement on the mainland at Raffles Bay instead. Here there was fresh water and a safe anchorage. He named it Fort Wellington and sailed on 29 July, for Penang from whence he was to return to England. He arrived there in the early months of 1828.⁽¹⁵⁾

CHAPTER 4. FOOTNOTES

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1. Western Australian Year Book, No. 13, 1974, p. 9.
2. Historical Records of Australia, Series I, Vol. XII, pp. 224-7.
3. p. 730
4. p. 777
5. He obviously didn't consider it opportune to add that all available knowledge of this Dutch discovered coastline had come from the frequent French investigations!
6. Historical Records of Australia, Series I, Vol. XII, pp. 778-9.
7. p. 780.
8. A reasonable argument. At that time British ships engaged in trade with China often sailed from England with virtually empty holds since few British goods were wanted there. Stirling added in his communication that perhaps British ships might get from the proposed colony goods that would be wanted in China: whale oil, seal skins, timber and trepang (sea slugs).
9. Historical Records of Australia, Series I, Vol. XII, p. 780.
10. p. 780.
11. M. Bassett, *The Hentys; An Australian Colonial Tapestry*, p. 83.
12. Historical Records of Australia, Series I, Vol. XII, p. 774.
13. J.M.R. Cameron, "Prelude to Colonisation: James Stirling's Examination of Swan River, March, 1827," *The Australian Geographer*, Vol. XII, No. IV, 1973, pp. 317-21.
 1. There are at least three published accounts of this examination. The most important is contained in *Historical Records of Australia*, Series III, Vol. VI, pp. 551-84. [This is reproduced in full in the "READINGS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY" which accompany this text.]

A second account was published in the *Sydney Gazette* on 18 April, 1827. The third is contained in the text of a letter from Charles Fraser to William Jackson Hooker of the Kew Botanical Gardens quoted in J.G. Hay, *The Visit of Charles Fraser to the Swan River in 1827, with his Opinion of the Suitableness of the District for a Settlement*, pp. 6-23. All three are used in this discussion.
 2. These Stirling recognised. *Historical Records of Australia*, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 552.
 3. Bassett, p. 85.
 4. *Historical Records of Australia*, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 560.
 5. p. 556.

- 6 p. 555.
- 7 p. 555.
- 8 Earths were distinguished from soils at the time because they had a lower humus content and a higher proportion of partly decomposed material.
See J.M. Wilson, (ed.) *Rural Cyclopedia*, Vol. IV, p. 250.
- 9 Hay, p. 7.
- 10 **Historical Records of Australia**, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 580: The country from Point Heathcote to the island must improve from the vast quantity of herbage seen on its banks.
- 11 Brome is an introduced species. As Fraser also referred to this as the 'Kangaroo grass of New South Wales', it is assumed that he was speaking of *Danthonia* spp. The *Themeda* family is not present on this section of the coastal plain.
- 12 Hay, p. 17.
- 13 *Sydney Gazette*, 18 April, 1827. See also Hay, pp. 15 and 18 and **Historical Records of Australia**, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 580. This was most probably a species of hakea as thistles are an introduced plant.
- 14 **Historical Records of Australia**, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 580. It is possible that "Gverbrown" is a misprint for "Everbrown". No reference to the former term has been located.
- 15 *Sydney Gazette*, 18 April, 1827.
- 16 **Historical Records of Australia**, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 568.
- 17 p. 571.
- 18 pp. 573-4.
- 19 p. 566.
- 20 p. 574.
- 21 p. 568.
- 22 pp. 577-8.
- 23 p. 575.
- 24 p. 576.
- 25 p. 567.

This effect of the sea breeze became an important feature of the geography of the Swan River Colony in speculator's accounts and penetrated as far as the Colonial Office.
See Colonial Office to Major Grey, 14 March, 1829, *Swan River Papers*, Vol. XVI, W.A.A.
- 26 **Historical Records of Australia**, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 576.
- 27 p. 576.
- 28 pp. 566-7.
- 29 pp. 581-2.
14. **Historical Records of Australia**, Series I, Vol. XIII, p. 264.
15. Bassett, p. 18.

CHAPTER 5

PROPOSALS FOR A SETTLEMENT

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As has previously been suggested, historical geographers are primarily concerned with the modification of the existing geography of a place and with the development of a new geography there. They want to know how this was done and why it was done, and, of course, in what sequence. They are not concerned with political matters as such except in so far as they effect the geography of a place. In regard to Swan River Colony, an historical geographer is concerned with the many and various developments that occurred when Stirling returned to England, eager and willing to use all means possible to secure the creation of a colony at Swan River, because these developments determined whether the Swan River environment was to be modified by a European settlement. More importantly, they determined who would undertake this modification, how many people would come, what sort of people they would be and how much influence government would have in controlling the processes.

It is important to stress that, at the time Stirling arrived back in England, the prevalent impression held of the west coast of Australia was the one the Dutch had held for several hundred years. It was considered to be barren, virtually waterless and a significant danger to shipping. For more than twenty years the French had investigated this coastline adding to the Dutch knowledge. Though few Englishmen were familiar with the reports of the French navigators, they were aware that, despite all their interest, the French had made no move to initiate settlement in this area themselves. To the English this signified that they probably accepted the Dutch verdict.

How, then, after the many unfavourable reports, was the one report from Captain Stirling, supported by the comments of a botanist, able to completely reverse the opinions prevalent at the time?⁽¹⁾ It didn't happen overnight but when it did happen, so great was the public enthusiasm in regard to a proposed settlement at Swan River, that contemporary writers coined the term "Swan River Mania" to describe it.

Stirling, back in London in the early months of 1828, found that primarily because of Admiralty views, Darling had been notified by a despatch dated 28 January, 1828, that no settlement was to be made at the Swan River because "so many millions of acres of a rich Country remain unoccupied on the Eastern side."⁽²⁾

Britain did not lack ports on the Indian Ocean nor did she need any more convict settlements in Australia — those she had were

costly enough — and so there was no government interest in Stirling's hopes. It may have remained that way had not a group of capitalists come forward willing to both create a colony at Swan River and provide the bulk of the capital needed, in return for grants of free land.

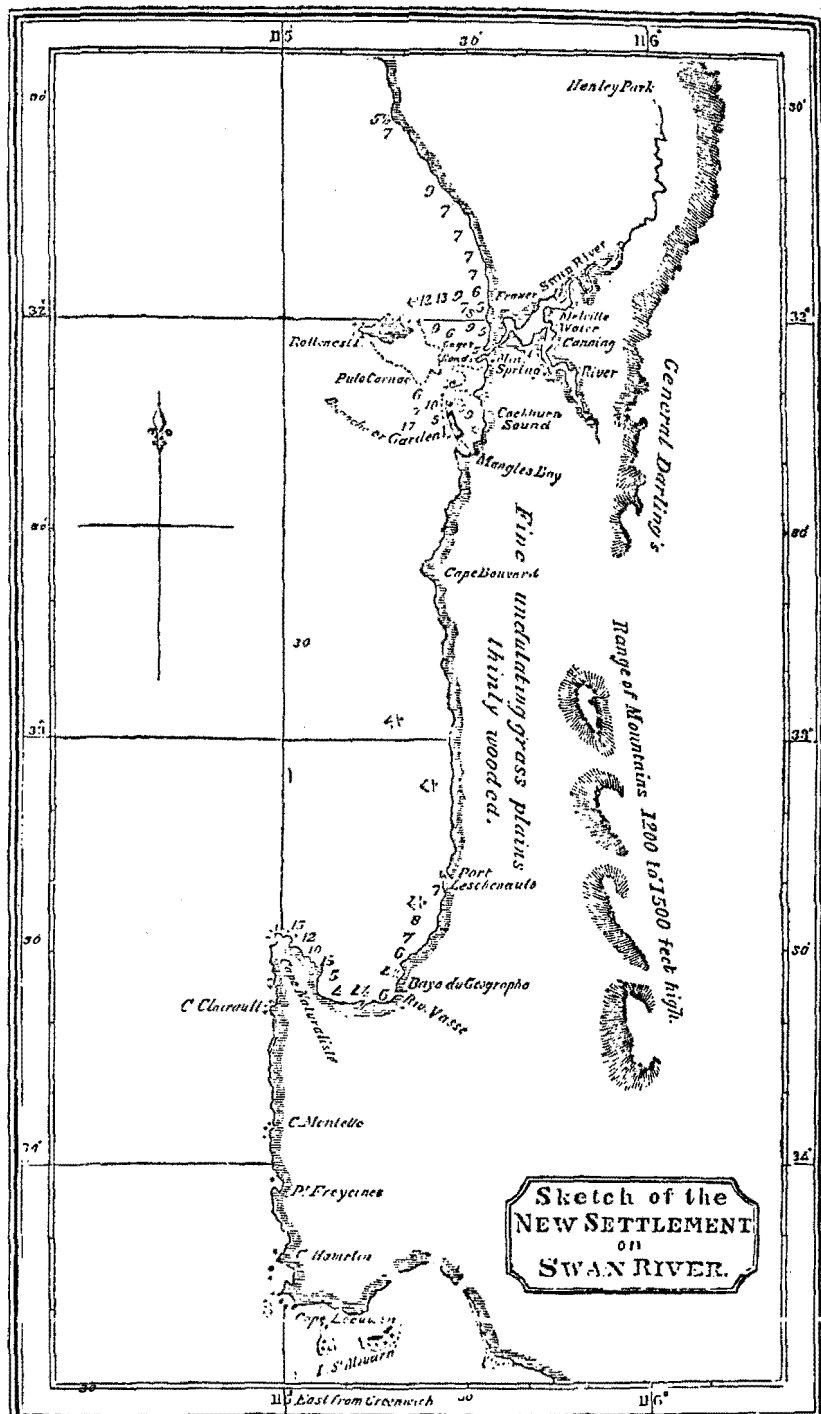
Stirling himself had conceived the idea of forming an association to undertake settlement in August. On 21 August, 1828, he and a Major Moody had written to Under-Secretary Hay asking whether "any objection would be made to the unsupported employment of Private Capital and Enterprise in the occupation and improvement"⁽³⁾ of Swan River territory. Stirling and Moody found no backers for their plans and the 'partnership' broke up. However Stirling succeeded in having the western coast of New Holland annexed, orders for this being issued on 7 November.⁽⁴⁾ At about this time several other gentlemen, all known to be rich, had formed an association and commenced negotiations with the Colonial Office with a view to settling and developing the Swan River lands. Their spokesman was Thomas Peel. On 14 November, they submitted a formal statement of their proposals in the form of a memorial to Sir George Murray.⁽⁵⁾ In essence, they proposed to send out 10,000 emigrants to the Swan River as settlers at the company's expense, requiring in return land valued at 1/6 an acre to the extent of their investment. Since their investment was calculated at £ 300,000 they were in effect asking for 4 million acres. The Colonial Office objected. The outcome was a compromise decision. A colony was to be founded at the Swan River, under the command of Stirling and Peel's Association was to receive a grant of no more than one million acres.⁽⁶⁾ This decision was given to the Association by Under-Secretary Hay of the Colonial Office on 6 December, 1828. Peel, on 28 January, 1829, accepted the conditions though the other members immediately withdrew from any participation.⁽⁷⁾

The day before, the Colonial Office had issued a public statement of its intentions in regard to the proposed Swan River Colony. The conditions listed were significant since this was to be the first colony established without convicts in Australia:

CONDITIONS FOR LAND GRANTS AT SWAN RIVER COLONIAL OFFICE, DECEMBER, 1828

Although it is the Intention of His Majesty's Government to form a Settlement on the Western Coast of Australia, the Government do not intend to incur any Expense in conveying Settlers or in supplying them with Necessaries after their Arrival.

Such persons, however, as may be prepared to proceed to that Country at their own Cost before the End of the Year 1829, in Parties comprehending a Proportion of not less than Five Female to Six Male Settlers, will receive Grants of Land in Fee Simple (free of Quit Rent) proportioned to the Capital which they may invest upon public or private Objects in the Colony, to the Satisfaction of His Majesty's Government at Home, certified by



Sketch-Plan, 1829:

This plan was published originally in the famous **Quarterly Review** article of April, 1829. Thirty pages of small type were devoted to the proposed settlement at Swan River. This article was one of the most important that contributed to the so-called "Swan River Mania".

This plan was the first of Swan River to be given mass circulation in England.

Courtesy Battye Library

the Superintendent or other Officer administering the Colonial Government, at the Rate of Forty Acres for every Sum of £ 3 so invested, provided they give previous Security; first, that all Supplies sent to the Colony, whether of Provisions, Stores or other Articles, which may be purchased by the Capitalists there, or which shall have been sent out for the Use of them or their Parties on the Requisition of the Secretary of State, if not paid for on Delivery in the Colony, shall be paid for at Home, each Capitalist being to be held liable in his Proportions; and secondly, that, on the Event of the Establishment being broken up by the Governor or Superintendent, all Persons desirous of returning to the British Islands shall be conveyed to their own Home at the Expense of the Capitalist by whom they may have been taken out. The Passages of labouring Persons, whether paid for by themselves or others, and whether they be Male or Female, provided the Proportion of the Sexes before mentioned be preserved, will be considered as an Investment of Capital entitling the Party by whom any such Payment may have been made to an Allowance of Land at the Rate of £ 15, that is, of 200 Acres of Land for the Passage of every such labouring Person over and above any other Investment of Capital.

Any Land thus granted, which shall not have been brought into Cultivation, or otherwise improved or reclaimed from its wild State, to the Satisfaction of Government, within Twenty-one Years from the Date of the Grant, shall, at the End of the Twenty-one Years, revert absolutely to the Crown.

All these Conditions with respect to free Grants of Land, and all Contracts of labouring Persons and others, who shall have bound themselves for a stipulated Term of Service, will be strictly maintained.

It is not intended that any Convicts or other Description of Prisoners be sent to this new Settlement.

The Government will be administered by Captain Stirling of the Royal Navy, as Civil Superintendent of the Settlement, and a Bill in the Nature of a Civil Charter will be submitted to Parliament in the Commencement of its next Session.⁽⁸⁾

These regulations, issued in the form of a circular, were modified by a new set issued from the Colonial Office on 3 February, 1829. Some significant changes were made in the original conditions. Only ten years was allowed for improving the land granted, instead of the original twenty-one. It was further stipulated that some improvements had to be made within three years to the value of 1/6 per acre. Failure to comply was to result in a fine. Whereas the original condition had set the end of 1829 as a time limit on arrival in the colony, the new ones extended this to the end of 1830.⁽⁹⁾

Contemporary observers in England were to label as "Swan River Mania", the public excitement that occurred when the announcement was made that a colony was to be formed at Swan River and the Colonial Office published what seemed to be very generous land regulations. The newspapers of the day contributed a great deal to this excitement. Hasluck notes that:

The newspapers of January 1829 all carried articles about the proposed new settlement at Swan River. In the ensuing months the **London Quarterly Review**, the **Gentleman's Magazine** and **Historical Chronicle**, the **Dublin Satirist**, the **Manchester Guardian**, the **Devonshire Chronicle** and provincial papers in Worcester, Cheshire, Derbyshire — in fact, all over England, published articles on the advantages of Swan River.⁽¹⁰⁾

The articles were based on the reports of 1827 made by Stirling and Fraser. There is doubt that journalists actually saw the originals since they were official government documents. Whatever their sources, the accounts published in newspapers, were increasingly distorted and were to be responsible for creating expectations that could not possibly be fulfilled. The **New Monthly Magazine** of June 1829, explained that "settlers cannot arrive at any season of the year without finding themselves enabled at once to plant some sort of grain...so that if they proceed with moderate prudence and industry, they can have little or no occasion to depend on others...". In an article in the **Westminster Review** of January, 1830, it was stated: "The summer winds are said to be invariably accompanied by rain." Stirling had been at Swan River at the end of Summer (March) but he had not reported rain as falling!

The Colonial Office itself was to support some of these incredible statements. In answer to questions raised by a prospective settler the following replies were given:

Question:

Is it more moist than New South Wales?

Answer:

It is worthy of remark that the Sea Breeze on the coast is usually at SSW and is therefore charged with moisture and very cool. This moderates the Action of the Sun in Summer while, at the same time, when condensed by the colder air of the mountains behind the Coast, the vapour it conveys descends like Showers.

Question:

Is the Soil supposed to be equally good?

Answer:

The Superiority of the Soil is mentioned as one of its greatest advantages, added to which is the facility with which a Settler can bring his farm into cultivation, owing to the open state of the Country, a state which allows not a greater average than ten trees to an Acre.

Question:

Is the Country supposed to be well watered?

Answer:

The general abundance of Springs producing water of the best quality, and the consequent permanent humidity of the Soil are two advantages which do not exist on the Eastern Coast.⁽¹¹⁾

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It seems that the Colonial Office, at that time was employing highly talented 'creative writers' rather than clerks! If these sorts of comments, seldom based on the known facts, were being made by reputable journals and the Colonial Office, one can imagine the announcements being made by those who stood to profit from prospective settlers — the shipping agents to name but one group. Lengthy though it may be, it is worth noting the following advertisement published by a shipping agent in journals at the time:

Swan River Settlement

The new settlement on Swan River is in one of the finest climates of the Universe, about 3 months sail from England, highly suited for the production of cotton, silk, tallow, provisions, linseed, hemp, flax, and corn and the culture of vine.

The country is of an open and undulating character, with excellent soil beautifully but not too much wooded; well adapted for wool-growing and the raising of stock. The coast and river literally teem with fish.

The shortness of distance between Swan River and the Cape of Good Hope, the Mauritius, the Indian Peninsula, Timor, Batavia, New South Wales, and many other important places, must open a door for commercial enterprise of a vast magnitude.

It has been calculated that rice, at one penny per pound, sugar at 3 pence per pound, coffee at 4 pence per pound, tea at 2 shillings and sixpence per pound, and many other commodities and live stock at equally low prices can be imported from Java in 5 weeks.

The harmless kangaroo seems to be the only wild animal in the occupation of this immense and beautiful country; while the splendid river and neighbouring lagoons are covered with myriads of swans and wild duck.

The fine teak-built ship Lady Campbell, Henry Murphy, Commander, burden 800 tons, possessing all the safe, splendid and roomy accommodation which a first-rate Indiaman is capable of affording, with more than half her cargo of goods and passengers already engaged, will sail for Swan River, Cockburn Sound, Port Vasse, and Port Leschenault on the 15th June next.

A Commissioner, furnished with the Government information, which includes the knowledge of the seat and situation of Swan Town, the exact position of all grants already made, the conditions of location, the regulations of the new Colony, its capabilities, woods, soils, fisheries and advantages, will sail in the Lady

Campbell and accompany emigrants to their destination for the sole purpose of assisting in their settlement, and otherwise affording them the benefit of his information on the spot.

Engagements with young, stout and healthy labourers and mechanics of good character, are in the course of arrangements; and settlers sailing by this ship may be supplied with such labourers and mechanics on very advantageous terms.

Settlers will have no purchase money to pay for their lands, nor will they be chargeable for any rent whatever; their Grants will be conveyed to them in fee simple and will descend to their assignees or heirs for ever, in the same manner and way as any Freehold in England; thereby affording them the satisfaction of knowing that their labour will be wholly expended on their own property, and that the results of their patient endeavours will be enjoyed by their children, and their names transmitted with such estates to distant posterity.

The Emigrant will not have to wage hopeless and ruinous war with interminable forests and impenetrable jungle, as he will find prepared by the hand of nature extensive plains ready for the ploughshare. He will not be frightened from his purposes by beasts of prey and loathsome reptiles. He will not be scorched by tropical heat nor chilled by the rigours of a Canadian winter. He will not be separated from the lofty protection of his native country, nor hardened in his heart by the debasing influence of being obliged to mingle with, and employ those bearing the brand of crime and punishment; and as no convict or any description of prisoner will be admitted into the Colony, those who establish property and families will feel that their names and fortunes cannot be mixed thereafter with any dubious ideas as to their origin.

Settlers will be provided at the Settlement with live stock and all kinds of agricultural implements on the lowest possible terms. Credit will be afforded to respectable Persons for a part of their passage money, should they require it, that they may not be crippled in providing themselves with necessaries for their location and the immediate commencement of cultivation.

Land so situated, *without tythes, taxes or rent*, under the special care and protection of His Majesty's Government, and where the British laws will be rigidly and uprightly administered, cannot fail being worth the attention of every industrious and discerning Briton.

Apply personally, or by letters post paid, to
H.C. Semphill,
East India Chambers,
Leadenhall Street."(12)

What effect did this glowingly favourable publicity have? The England of the time was one undergoing massive social change, feeling the full impact of the agrarian and industrial revolutions as well as the aftermath of a lengthy and costly war. The introduction of steam power into factories in the 1780's had heralded the beginning of the Factory System and grimy manufacturing towns were springing into existence throughout England. Their populations were swelled by the massive depopulation of the countryside occasioned by the widespread enclosures, a by-product of the new techniques in agriculture.

Not everyone found employment in the cities. To the ranks of the unemployed were added the soldiers and sailors demobilised at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Poverty was widespread, and so was crime.

In 1815 two thousand immigrants (convicts were not counted) left England, most bound for the United States and Canada, and some for Australia. By 1819, the number was thirty four thousand,⁽¹³⁾ and it continued to increase. This, then, was the situation when the news of the proposed colony "broke". Hasluck summed it up admirably:

To all those officers on half pay and soldiers on pensions too small to be of much use, the new land offered a challenge again in a life that had grown difficult and dull after the excitements of war. The agrarian revolution and the land enclosures had forced a great number of small yeomen to become no more than farm labourers; to these the prospect of owning their own land again was alluring. The industrial revolution had produced a state of poverty and depression from which numbers wished to escape. The crowded slums of manufacturing cities made an uninhabited and savage wilderness seem infinitely preferable. Gentleman, soldier, farmer, tradesman, poor man, adventurer — the vast empty new land attracted them all.⁽¹⁴⁾

Thus a situation was created wherein excessive expectations were raised as to the colony's potential, amongst people, many of whom were ill-equipped for a competitive existence in a more favourable environment than the Swan River colony was to give them. Cameron has pointed out that the interest in the proposed settlement can partly be attributed to the

growing appreciation of the benefits of colonisation, of particular significance in this instance because Western Australia was the first British colony to be founded solely for private settlement since before the American War of Independence.

However, he notes:

the high level of excitement was accompanied by even higher expectations which indicate that prospective settlers believed the Swan River area offered them immediate and tangible rewards. This view is re-inforced by the subsequent flood of immigrants

who numbered more than two thousand in the first twelve months — more than a third of the total free migration to New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land in the previous eight years.⁽¹⁵⁾

Stirling, with the first group of colonists, sailed from Spithead in the hired transport **Parmelia** on 6 February, 1829. The stage had been set for a massive relocation in space — a new habitat was to be pioneered on the basis of high expectations as to its suitability for European settlement.

CHAPTER 5. FOOTNOTES

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1. Stirling realised the problem he faced in trying to convince officialdom of what he believed to be the true nature of Swan River. In a letter to Under-Secretary Hay of the Colonial Office on 30 July, 1828, he wrote:

The Report, which I had the honour to make last year to His Majesty's Government, differs so widely from that of the preceding Dutch and French Navigators, that it will scarcely be believed that we undertake to describe the same country, for, while they report it as Sterile, forbidding and un hospitable, I represent it as the Land which, of all that I have seen in various quarters of the World, possesses the greatest natural attractions.

Historical Records of Australia, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 585.

2. **Historical Records of Australia, Series I, Vol. XIII, p. 739.**
3. **Historical Records of Australia, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 586.**
4. p. 587.
5. pp. 588-90.
6. A. Hasluck, **Thomas Peel of Swan River**, p. 30.
7. p. 29.
8. **Historical Records of Australia, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 594.**
9. pp. 606-8.
10. A. Hasluck, **Portrait With Background: A Life of Georgiana Molloy**, pp. 16-7.
11. Colonial Office to Major Grey, 14 March, 1829, **Swan River Papers**, Vol. XVI, W.A.A.
12. **Swan River Papers, Vol. V, W.A.A.**
13. Hasluck, **Portrait With Background**, p. 15.
14. p. 17.
15. J.M.R. Cameron, "Prelude to Colonisation: James Stirling's Examination of Swan River, March, 1827," **The Australian Geographer**, Vol. XII, No. IV, 1973, p. 309.
16. J.S. Battye, **Western Australia; A History from its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth**, p. 81.
17. **Historical Records of Australia, Series III, Vol. VI, pp. 606-8.**

CHAPTER 6

THE FIRST TOWN-SITES : LOCATIONAL CHOICES

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The location of a city demonstrates a geographical decision of great significance. Perth as a city is today very much the product of a decision made by Stirling soon after he landed in 1829. Had he decided to locate it elsewhere its present distinctive morphology (or structure), a product of its site, would not have occurred. If, for example, Perth had been located at Mangles Bay, the southern end of Cockburn Sound, the unusual lineal nature of the central city area would have been unlikely to occur. The routeways focussing on it would have also had a different pattern. The pattern of routeways is a most important factor in determining the ultimate areal development of the city and its surrounding region.

In considering the location of a city, geographers are concerned basically with two factors: site and situation. Site refers to the physical characteristics of the place where the city is built; Situation refers to the location in relationship to other places.

Did Stirling have any plan for the location of his seat of government before he arrived at the Swan River in 1829? We cannot be sure. Fraser, the botanist who had accompanied him in 1827 had, in a letter that year to a friend, commented on the suitability of the Buckland Hill area, lying between Rocky Bay on the river and the nearby coast. The locality is now known as Mosman Park:

These hills are admirably adapted for the site of a town, their elevated situation commanding a view of the whole of Canning Sound [sic], and the meanderings of the river. Their lying open to all breezes, too, is an additional advantage.⁽¹⁾

Another member of the expedition, Augustus H. Gilbert, who was ship's clerk on the *Success*, made reference to the Buckland Hill area in his journal as well as discussing the problem of navigation in the Swan:

Our expectations of the advantages of a settlement at Swan River are now fully confirmed, and although it would be impossible for vessels of above ten tons to enter the river at any state of the tide in safety, at the present entrance, it would be practicable at small expense to cut a canal at about four miles [sic] from the mouth of the river to the sea.

The distance necessary to cut is only a mile [sic], and would immediately lead into water of twelve fathoms both in the river and in the sea. The land is rocky and would afford excellent sides to the canal.⁽²⁾

1841 Beagle Map

Shows the Buckland Hill and Rocky Bay area with the annotation "proposed canal". Was this possibility still under discussion?

Source: Lands and Surveys Department, Perth.

Courtesy Battye Library

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Gilbert was referring to an area between Rocky Bay and the present Leighton Beach. The distance was in reality only two miles from the mouth of the river. The canal proposed would have been a little over a quarter of a mile in length.

What was done about these suggestions? It seems highly unlikely that Fraser and Gilbert would not have discussed the Buckland Hill site with Stirling, yet there is no evidence that he gave it any consideration after his arrival at the Swan in 1829 when he was actively engaged in seeking a site for his capital. There is no doubt that he was aware of the possibilities of creating a safe harbour at Rocky Bay because he referred specifically to it in the "Observations on the Territory" that he presented to Darling:

The entrance to Melville Water between the Heads is over a bar: there is a Channel with six feet Water on it at low water. It is only practicable therefore for Boats. About a Mile inside the Heads, the Water deepens and then commences a succession of Natural Cliffs or Wharfs with 4, 5 and 6 fathoms close to their sides. For several Miles upwards there are from 5 to 8 fathoms over a large expanse of Water.

The magnificent Bason there displayed would be the first Harbour in the world if it has an entrance; and such an entrance might be made without difficulty or great expense.⁽³⁾

Why, if he was aware of the potential of the site did Stirling give it little or no consideration on his return in 1829?

Roe, the Surveyor-General, was certainly aware of the location, which he called Buckland Downs. It appeared as such on the John Arrowsmith map of the "Colony of Western Australia" published in London in 1833.⁽⁴⁾

Though doubt will probably remain as to whether Stirling ever considered the Buckland Hill site for Perth there can be no doubt that the "Proposed Canal" was discussed officially since the comment appears on a map prepared by officers of H.M.S. Beagle during a visit to the Colony in 1841. The label occurs at the precise location specified by Gilbert.⁽⁵⁾

Were any instructions given to Stirling in regard to a possible town-site before his departure from England? In a despatch dated 30 December, 1828, Sir George Murray had in fact included some comments on this matter:

Amongst your earliest duties will be that of determining the most convenient site for a Town to be erected as the future Seat of Government.

You will be called upon to weigh maturely the advantages, which may arise from placing it on so secure a situation as may be afforded on various points of the Swan River, against those which may follow from establishing it on so fine a port for the reception

of Shipping, as Cockburn Sound is represented to be.⁽⁶⁾

With such a vague direction, Stirling arrived at the Swan River on 1 June, 1829, in the *Parmelia*, which grounded on the sand bank which now bears her name at the northern end of Cockburn Sound. It was only through the strenuous efforts of Captain Fremantle and the crew of the *Challenger*, the ship sent to formally annexe New Holland, that the *Parmelia* was freed. The surf was too rough to attempt a landing on the mainland or even on Garden Island that day.⁽⁷⁾ The weather worsened and on 4 June, a gale set in. On 7 June, Stirling decided to make Garden Island his headquarters because of the continuing bad weather.

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Did Stirling consider that Garden Island might serve as the seat of his government? It concerned Captain Fremantle that he might. However in a letter to his brother Walter, written on September 9, 1829, Stirling explained:

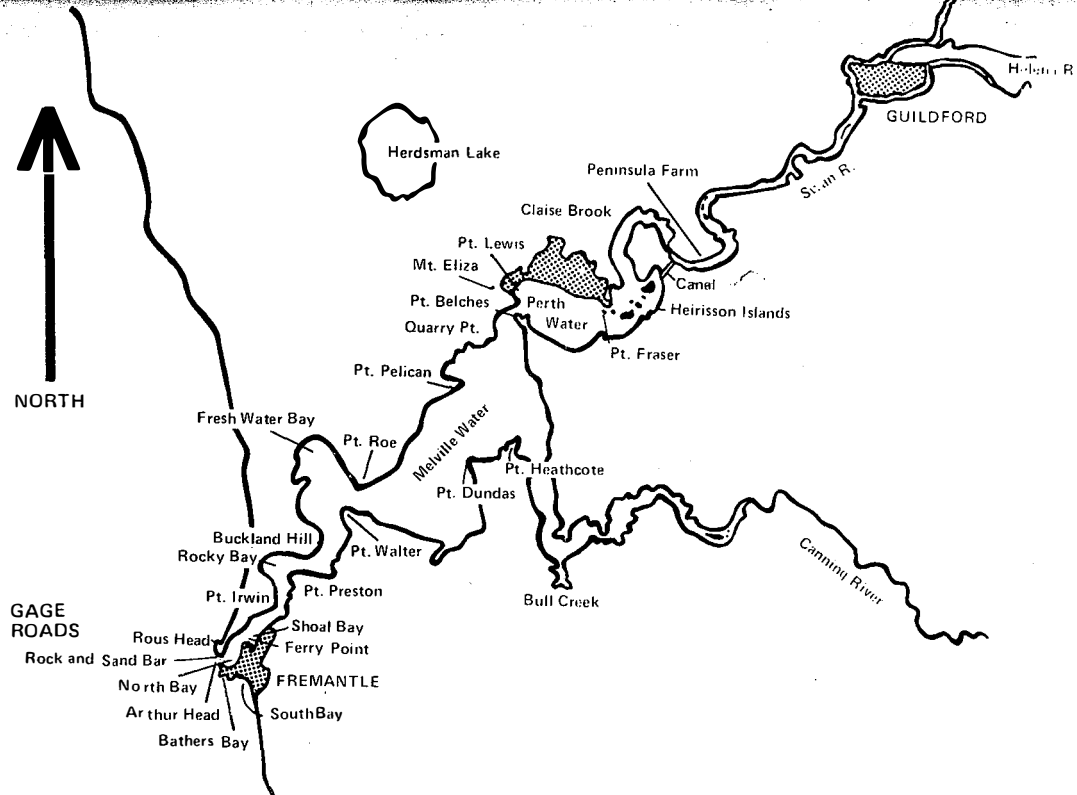
I placed my establishment on Garden Island in temporary buildings, the weather being too boisterous to admit of making a large settlement on the mainland at a great distance from the ships which were anchored under the lee side of the island.⁽⁸⁾

Some significant evidence exists that suggests he may have given some thought to the possibility of Garden Island as a headquarters, but only for several days. He had himself, even before leaving England, been granted land on the island in response to a request made by him to Under-Secretary Hay on 26 December, 1828.⁽⁹⁾ Hay's reply, on 1 January, 1829, had stipulated that Stirling could have all the island except.

that it will be necessary to reserve for the use of the Crown a certain Portion of Land along the North-eastern Side of the Island, in case it should hereafter be found expedient to erect any Buildings in that Quarter; and that any Points of Land, which should appear adapted to the Erection of Works of Defence at some future Period, must also be reserved in a similar Manner.⁽¹⁰⁾

He went ahead with the building of the first Government House at Cliff Head on the northern end of the island overlooking Sulphur Bay and he, his wife and their establishment of servants remained there many weeks after the Perth site had been chosen and established.⁽¹¹⁾ Despite Fremantle's fears, it seems unlikely that Stirling would have seriously considered that the colony's headquarters could be operated from an offshore island on a permanent basis, so real was the risk of isolation during severe storms.

By 9 June Stirling was off searching the mainland for a possible site for his capital. The previous day all the settlers from the *Parmelia* had been landed on Garden Island. Later in the day H.M.S. *Sulphur* had arrived, laden with stores and provisions as well as the detachment of soldiers from the 63rd Regiment and some settlers. They, too, had been landed on Garden Island. So fierce were the seas that



the garrison soldiers of the 63rd could not be ferried across to the mainland to relieve the **Challenger's** marines, who guarded the flag placed at the mouth of the river by Fremantle on 2 May. The seas did not daunt Stirling. He and Fremantle crossed to the mainland and inspected Mangles Bay, the present site of Rockingham. Fremantle's diary records: "Stirling . . . appeared pleased with the Bay and thought it might be made the Harbour and the Town."⁽¹²⁾

Yet nowhere else in Stirling's records was this possibility discussed even at a later date. Why did Stirling abandon this idea, in spite of the fact that Sir George Murray had suggested Cockburn Sound as a possibility? Perhaps he was conscious of Murray's advice to site the capital "on so secure" a position as may be afforded on various points of the Swan River."⁽¹³⁾ Was the operative word, for Stirling, "secure"? Did it cause him to consider aspects of defence? It is interesting to speculate. During the 1812 war between England and the United States, Stirling had commanded a 28 gun sloop, **H.M.S. Brazen**. He had operated in and around the Gulf of Mexico and in four months had utterly destroyed the American fortifications at the mouth of the Mississippi River. He had managed to do this even in the face of hurricanes which are severe in that part of the world.⁽¹⁴⁾ It may well be that Murray's word "secure", as well as his memories of the past, caused Stirling to think in terms of a safer inland location for his capital.

On 18 June, the weather having moderated a little, a ceremony was carried out on Rous Head on the north bank at the mouth of the Swan River. A proclamation was read, officially inaugurating the colony. The next day, in search of a site for his capital, Stirling sailed up-river, thus becoming the first European to do the journey a second time.⁽¹⁵⁾ No official records or private diaries record how many journeys Stirling made in his search. It is certain that a number of other expeditions were undertaken in both June and July to learn more about the environs of the Swan. In all likelihood these explorations were not only to seek information about the countryside but also to consider possible town-sites.

On 26 June, 1829 a party of officers and men from the **Challenger**, led by Lieutenant Henry, landed at Browne Mount, Cockburn Sound and moved inland to discover the source of the Canning River and to explore the surrounding countryside. They covered "100 miles or upwards" in a period of five days tracing the course of the Canning from its source to the junction with the Swan River.⁽¹⁶⁾ In the next month, July, Commander Mark Currie, Harbour-Master to the colony, explored south and south-east of the Swan giving favourable reports of the soil but making no comments about possible town-sites.⁽¹⁷⁾

It had now been over a month since the **Parmelia** had arrived, yet still no decision had been made as to the location of a capital. Why? There is no doubt that the severity of the winter hampered activities most seriously. Not only did it hinder movement but it also

restricted greatly the sorts of activities that could be undertaken even if a townsite had been decided upon. And precisely because the foul weather had shown up so dramatically the problem of anchorage off the Swan River coast, Stirling had obviously adjusted his priorities. He was using the services of the two men, most competent to professionally assess possible town-sites, to carefully survey Cockburn Sound.⁽¹⁸⁾ The two men concerned were: John Septimus Roe, Surveyor to the Colony and H.C. Sutherland, Assistant-Surveyor.⁽¹⁹⁾ With the help of men from the Challenger, Roe and Sutherland commenced work on 9 June.⁽²⁰⁾

Probably another important factor in delaying Stirling's decision on a town site was his belief that he had ample time before more settlers would arrive. He was wrong! To his consternation the Calista arrived on 5 August with forty seven settlers on board, followed the very next day by the St Leonard with no settlers but laden with stores, provisions and stock. Stirling felt compelled to act. The survey of Cockburn Sound was suspended and Roe and Sutherland were sent to the mainland. Roe, Stirling, some officials and settlers as well, sailed up the Swan on 11 August and on that day a choice was made of a site for the seat of government.⁽²¹⁾ It lay on the right bank of the Swan River some twelve miles from its mouth and slightly to the east of Mount Eliza.⁽²²⁾ The official foundation ceremony was held the following day, which was the anniversary of the birthday of the reigning monarch, King George IV.⁽²³⁾ The town was named Perth to commemorate both the birthplace and the constituency of the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir George Murray. From 13 to 25 August, Roe worked on the survey of the Perth town site, moving then to the site chosen by Stirling for another town at the mouth of the Swan River. Roe completed his survey of this town site, named Fremantle after the captain of the Challenger, on 18 September.⁽²⁴⁾

Did Stirling actively consider any other site along the river rather than the one he finally chose? He made at least two journeys on such a task on 19 June and 11 August, and there may well have been others, yet his records do not indicate any other possibilities considered at this time. But comments made by a naval surgeon who visited the colony in 1829 and described it in a book published soon after, as well as correspondence by Stirling himself in 1832, might indicate otherwise. The surgeon who came in October-November, 1829, T.B. Wilson, R.N., of the Governor Phillips, visited both Perth and Fremantle and even made an expedition up the Canning. In his book *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World*, published in 1835, he strongly criticised the choice of site for Perth and stressed Point Heathcote as a much better location for the capital.

In a footnote to his book, Wilson mentioned that he had learned from "a high authority" on his return to England that Point Heathcote had in actual fact been officially suggested as an ideal site for the capital. He did not add who the "high authority" was, to whom the suggestion had been made, by whom, or even when.⁽²⁵⁾

It is easy to imagine that Colonial Office officials gazing at Stirling's 1827 map of the Swan, could have seen Point Heathcote as an ideal choice: prominent, with river vistas, yet easily defensible as well as able to profit from water-transport on two rivers. But had the suggestion been made to Stirling? Murray's despatch had specified either Cockburn Sound or "various points" on the Swan River. If he meant "points" as a promontory of land there were certainly a great number of those, or did he mean places? If anyone did suggest Point Heathcote as a site to Stirling, then no official documents survive to establish definitely who it was. There is one letter which does indicate that it could have been Under-Secretary Hay. The evidence is, however, inconclusive. Stirling wrote to Hay on 7 January, 1832: "I observe that you are desirous of knowing why the Site of one of the Chief Towns has not been placed on the Point intervening between the confluence of the two rivers."⁽²⁶⁾ It's unlikely the rivers concerned were the Helena and Swan because there is no prominent "Point" between them — the reference can only be to Point Heathcote. However the letter does not prove the existence of any prior instruction. It may be that once the Perth site was chosen, Hay was puzzled as to why what looked like a better site had been ignored.

Why did Stirling choose the Perth site? His despatches indicate a variety of reasons. To Horace Twiss, who was the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Colonies (and a personal friend)⁽²⁷⁾ he wrote:

The position chosen is about seven miles [sic] from the Sea on the right Bank of the Swan River. It is one of great beauty as respects Scenery and at the same time possesses the more substantial advantages of Stone, Lime, Wood, Clay and other building Materials and is situated at the point where the rocky soil of the Sea Coast gives place to the rich alluvial land on the banks of the River.⁽²⁸⁾

In Stirling's first despatch to Sir George Murray on 9 September, 1829 he gave a different stress:

The arrival of two other ships with settlers making it necessary to have locations prepared for them, I have been under the necessity of interrupting the general survey of the surrounding coast and country, for the purpose of laying out the town of Fremantle at the entrance of Melville Water as a landing port, and also the town of Perth near the island on the Swan River, with a view to its being in the neighbourhood of those who may wish to cultivate the rich lands immediately above it on the river.⁽²⁹⁾

It is in Stirling's letter to Hay on 7 January, 1832 that more detailed reasons are given for selecting the site of Perth in its present position:

On our arrival here with the expedition the imperfect knowledge which I had of the country was of course soon extended and it

was found in consequence that a Town at the mouth of the Estuary would be requisite for landing goods and as a Port Town, while another sufficiently high on the River to afford easy communication between the Agriculturalists on the Upper Swan and the Commercial Interest at the Port would tend much to the speedy occupation of that useful District.

In selecting a site for this purpose, the present position seemed to be so decidedly preferable in building materials, streams of water and facility of communication that I was induced to these grounds to establish the Town here.⁽³⁰⁾

The original site chosen was never altered though as late as 1832, Stirling was not adamant that it would remain as the capital:

Perth has hitherto been considered the Capital, and I see no reason for supposing that it will cease to be so, but I am not prepared to say positively that reasons may not occur for removing the Seat of Government to some other place when the course of events may point out sufficient motives for a change. It would be to assume the powers of Prophecy to say at the commencement of a Colony where the Capital ought to be placed, for Interests seem to rise up which never were anticipated and others of apparent importance at first cease to exist, but as soon as a reasonable idea may be formed of the probable Destiny of the Colony then the important point of settling the position of the Capital may be easily decided.⁽³¹⁾

There is one basic fact that is stressed in these communications to Twiss, to Hay and to Sir George Murray. In each Stirling points out that the site chosen was one that was near to the better alluvial soils, near to where the bulk of the population would be settled. If this to him was the most important factor, one wonders why he did not choose a site at or near Guildford which would have been more central to what came to be the most important agricultural district in the early years. Perhaps he hoped for more development along the lower Canning which failed to occur.

The other major factor he mentioned was the availability of building materials. With a total lack of roads for land transport and with numerous buildings to be erected this was surely a valid reason. He mentions also the availability of water in his letter to Twiss, another important consideration. One other factor must not be overlooked and that was the scenic attractiveness of the site which he drew to Twiss' attention.

There can be no argument that the advantages possessed by the site were real and important. There was, however, one serious disadvantage which he did not enumerate and this assumes importance when consideration is given to his failure to choose the site at Point Heathcote, a site which would have radically changed the shape of the town that came to be a major city. There is no doubt that there was

fresh water available at Point Heathcote as both Fraser and Stirling commented on this is their reports in 1827. In addition Stirling marked "many fresh springs of water" at this location on a chart he prepared of the Swan River.⁽³¹⁾ But the site eventually chosen for Perth was not examined in 1827 and it must be admitted that there was **more** fresh water available there than at Point Heathcote. What about building materials? There was as much timber at Point Heathcote as at Perth but probably no clay and this was needed for brick-making. In terms of natural beauty there was little difference.

The one great advantage possessed by Point Heathcote was that it lay on the same side of the river as Fremantle. It was necessary, if there was to be a port at the mouth of the river, that it be on the south side, because that was the area where the safest anchorage lay. Given that fact, a south bank location for the capital would have made land communication ever so much easier in the earlier years with no need for ferries to be used to cross the river between Fremantle and Perth and between Perth and Guildford. By contrast only one ferry or bridge would have been needed on the Canning, a much narrower river than the Swan.

Given the advantages of a south bank location, perhaps a case could have been made for a site for the capital near Point Belches, in that area of South Perth now occupied by the Zoo. No records exist of Stirling having given that possibility any thought at all.

Nevertheless, when Stirling chose the Perth site he must have been aware of the communications problem. As a sailor he probably believed water communication would be more important than land and therefore a north bank location posed no serious problem. Partly because of his decision water transport **did** become very important and remained so for much of the century, until at least the building of the railway in 1881.

What, in fact, was the nature of the north bank site and did it suffer from disadvantages other than the problem of land communications?

The area chosen by Stirling lay slightly to the east of Mt Eliza with a topography that was to determine the shape of the city centre in the future. A narrow ridge, probably a fossil sand dune lying in the lee of Mt Eliza ran almost due south-east and parallel to the shores of Perth Water at a height of slightly over fifty feet. Along this ridge were two higher points: one chosen as the original church square (and now the site of the Catholic Cathedral) with a height of 80 feet and one further east (overlooking the present Gloucester Park) with a height of nearly 100 feet. From there the ridge dropped rapidly to the river north of Fraser Point. Hay Street was to be built along the crest of this ridge. North of the ridge the land dropped quickly to a chain of lakes and swamps draining eastwards through Claise Brook into the river.

There are several disadvantages possessed by this site as distinct from its situation. Water there was in over abundance. To the north the

swamps not only hindered development and expansion but bred huge numbers of mosquitos and other pests. Springs and streams draining in either direction from the ridge dissected the site and posed drainage problems, interfering with the construction of both roads and buildings. The ridge was directly exposed to the hot easterlies of summer yet denied the early cooling sea breezes because of the bulk of Mt Eliza.

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To sum up, it must be seen that Stirling's choice of a place for his capital was a relatively good one in the context of requirements at the time. In terms of situation it was central to the developments anticipated at both the port and the known agricultural lands; it was strategically sound for, though within reach of the port it was inaccessible to a waterborne hostile naval force; and it was able to capitalise on river communications though it posed problems for land transport. In terms of site it had fresh water, building materials, land easy to clear and build on and scenic beauty, though its expansion to the north was hindered somewhat by bodies of water.

CHAPTER 6

FOOTNOTES

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1. In a letter to his friend, William Hooker, of the Kew Botanical Gardens, quoted by J.G. Hay, *The Visit of Charles Fraser to the Swan River in 1827, with his Opinion on the Suitableness of the District for a Settlement*, p. 9.

For how long was Canning Sound known as such? The "Chart of the Swan River from a Survey by Captain James Stirling, R.N. 1827," now in the British Museum, London, shows the names Gage's Road and Cockburn Sound but not Canning Sound. Gage's Road (or, as it soon came to be known: Gage Roads) was named after Rear Admiral Gage, Commander-in-Chief of the East India Station at Trincomalee and Stirling's immediate superior in 1827. It is interesting to note that Stirling himself, with the acting rank of Admiral, became Commander-in-Chief of the East India Station in January, 1854.

Cockburn Sound was named after Sir George Cockburn, a friend of Stirling and a Junior Lord of the Admiralty, who became First Sea Lord in 1841.

The name Canning was transferred to the Canning River, named the Entree Moreau by Heirisson, a Frenchman, who believed it to be an arm of the sea, in 1801. Canning was Prime Minister of England in 1827.

2. Hay, p. 36.

3. M. Uren, *Land Looking West: The Story of Sir James Stirling in Western Australia*, p. 287.

4. Map of the Colony of Western Australia by John Arrowsmith, London, 1833, Map 6C, W.A.A.

5. Map of Swan River, Western Australia, H.M.S. Beagle, 1841, Lands and Surveys Department, Perth.

6. *Historical Records of Australia*, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 600.

7. This island had been named Ile Buache by the French navigator, Baudin, in 1803. During his visit in 1827, Stirling had planted various vegetable seeds in a plot on the island and this is why the name Garden Island was used, becoming the official title on 29 June, 1829. The French had named the next island north of it Ile Berthollet but in 1827 Stirling re-named it Carnac because John Rivett Carnac, Lieutenant on the *Success*, had successfully navigated the ship into Cockburn Sound. Actually, Stirling called it Pulo Carnac, pulo being the Malay word for island.

8. The original letter, believed by some experts to be a copy, is housed in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. This quote was taken from Uren, p. 93.

9. *Historical Records of Australia*, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 598.

10. p. 603.

11. Uren, p. 94.

12. Quoted in Uren, p. 95. It has been suggested that Mangles Bay was named after Captain Mangles, a keen amateur botanist, who visited the area in 1831. See V.G. Fall, *The Sea and the Forest*, p. 6. However, the name is shown on Stirling's 1827 chart. It was probably named after either G.W. Mangles or

J. Mangles. The former was Stirling's wife's cousin who arrived with Stirling on the **Parmelia** as Superintendent of Government Stock. The latter was Stirling's father-in-law, and a director of the East India Company and a Member of Parliament.

13. **Historical Records of Australia**, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 600.
 14. Uren, p. 17.
 15. p. 26.
 16. J. Cross, (ed.) **Journals of Several Expeditions made in Western Australia during the Years 1829 - 1832**, pp 1-5.
 17. Captain Stirling to Sir George Murray, 9 September, 1829, "Swan River Papers", Vol. III, W.A.A.
 18. Captain Stirling to Horace Twiss, 25 August, 1829, "Swan River Papers", Vol. III, W.A.A.
 19. Though only 32 at the time of his arrival in the colony, Roe had had considerable surveying and cartographic experience. From 1817 - 1822 he had been on H.M.S. **Mermaid**, a ship commanded by Lieutenant Phillip King, who had undertaken surveys of much of the west coast of Australia though not in the area near the Swan River. Sutherland, 25 years old at the time, was described by Roe as "a very gentlemanly young man who has had ten years experience as a land surveyor". (Uren, p. 65)
 20. Proceedings of the Survey Department, Folio 1, W.A.A.
 21. Proceedings of the Survey Department, Folio 1, W.A.A.
 22. Named by Stirling after Mrs Eliza Darling, wife of the N.S.W. Governor in 1827.
 23. Was this why Stirling chose this day?
This was the date twenty-six years earlier on which Stirling had joined the Royal Navy, and the date on which he received his Lieutenant's commission in 1809. (Uren, p. 17)
 24. Proceedings of the Survey Department, Folio 1, W.A.A.
 25. Uren, p. 99.
 26. Governor Stirling to Under-Secretary Hay, 7 January 1832, "Swan River Papers", Vol. X, W.A.A.
 27. Twiss was, therefore, a member of Parliament. Robert William Hay was the Permanent Under-Secretary for the Colonies from 1825 - 1836.
 28. Captain Stirling to Horace Twiss, 25 August 1829, "Swan River Papers", Vol. III, W.A.A.
 29. Captain Stirling to Sir George Murray, 9 September 1829, "Swan River Papers", Vol. III, W.A.A.
- It might be noted that Stirling made a slight error in this statement. The **Calista** arrived with settlers on 5 August but the **St Leonard** brought supplies and no settlers the following day. The **Marquis of Anglesea** arrived on 23 August with settlers but that was after the selection of the Perth site.
30. Governor Stirling to Under-Secretary Hay, 7 January, 1832, "Swan River Papers", Vol. X, W.A.A.
 31. Copy in Uren, opp. p. 277. The original is in the British Museum, London.

CHAPTER 7

PERTH AND FREMANTLE

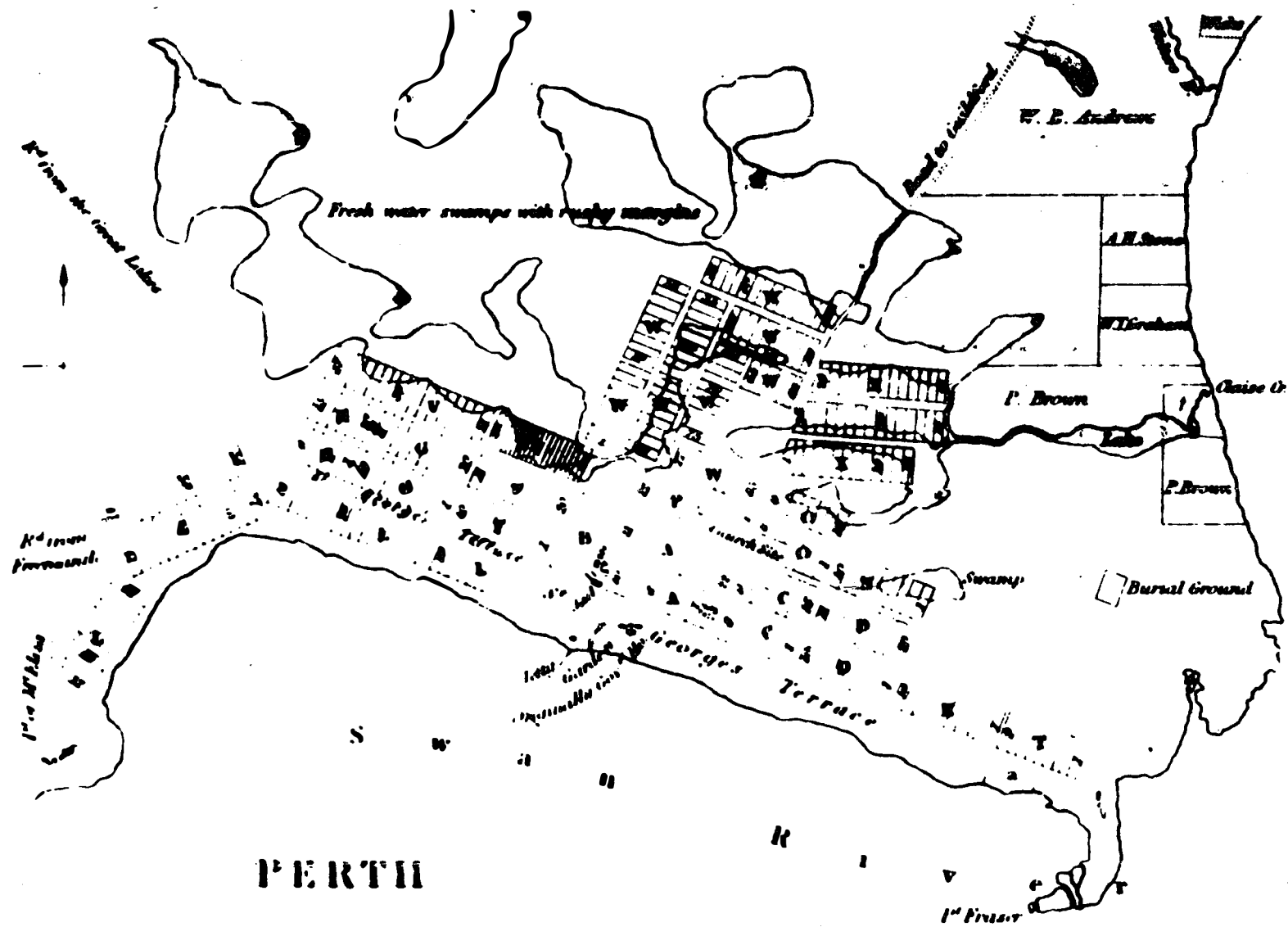
The great majority of country towns in Western Australia were to grow up initially as haphazard arrays of buildings stretched out along the main roads. Perth and Fremantle, as well as several other towns such as Guildford and Augusta, were built to a plan. In this regard they were strikingly different from most of the other towns developing at that time in the eastern colonies. Before any construction of a permanent nature was commenced in 1829, the sites of Perth and Fremantle were chosen, the areas were surveyed, and individual blocks were pegged. The initial surveys were hasty and in some places inaccurate but these errors were quickly remedied — an accurate survey was completed of Fremantle in 1833 and of Perth in 1838. (SEE PLANS.)

Murray's instructions to Stirling had been specific in regard to the laying out the town chosen as the seat of government:

to guard against the evils to be apprehended from an improvident disposal of the land in the immediate vicinity of the Town, you will take care that a square of three Miles (or 1,920 acres) is reserved for its future extension; and that the land within this space is not granted away (as in ordinary cases) but shall be held upon leases from the Crown for a term not exceeding twenty-one years.⁽¹⁾

Roe and Sutherland worked on the survey of the Perth town-site from 13 to 25 August, 1829. Just below the crest of the low, well-timbered ridge a street was laid out running almost due south-east. It was named St George's Terrace. Other streets were surveyed parallel to and at right angles to this main street so that the area was divided into blocks averaging nine or ten acres, with the long sides running in an east-west direction and short cross streets running almost north-south. Each of these blocks was subdivided into an average of ten allotments, so that each of these was approximately nine-tenths of an acre. Each allotment ran through the block in a north-south direction, having two narrow street frontages of about one and a half chains and a length of about six chains. (SEE 1833 PLAN.)

Stirling and his Board of Counsel drew up regulations under which both town lots and rural land were to be opened up. Those were completed on 28 August, three days after the Perth survey was completed.⁽²⁾ On 5 September the first allotments in Perth were disposed of. There was obviously no great rush for these since only five were taken up immediately though twenty more were



The "1833 Plan" of Perth

This plan was drawn as an inset in the map prepared by the famous London cartographer, John Arrowsmith, from "documents furnished to the Colonial Office by J.S. Roe, Esq., Surveyor General."

The complete 1833 map is shown elsewhere in this text.

Note particularly the location of the following:

1. The freshwater lakes north of Perth and Claise Brook.
2. St George's Terrace which runs the full length of the town, and is, in the east, a true terrace in that there are no allotments between it and the river at this stage.
3. Pt Fraser, which disappeared many years later when land was reclaimed from the river to form Langley park.
4. The original position of Government House.
5. The "garden", planted by the Colonial Botanist, James Drummond.
6. The "Burial Ground" which became the East Perth Cemetery.
7. Roads to Fremantle, Guildford and the Great Lakes.
8. Location B – The Town Square.

Courtesy Battye Library

taken by the end of the year. The first lessees were F.C. Irwin, Rev. J.B. Wittenoom, M. Hodges, G. Leake and P. Parker Smith.⁽³⁾ Except for Irwin's, their blocks lay on the south side of St George's Terrace between Barrack Street and William Street, both of which ran down to the water's edge at that time. The Rev. J.B. Wittenoom, who was the Colonial Chaplain, took the first two blocks and built his house where the present 'T and G' building stands. Irwin took two allotments in the next block to the west so that his land lay on the west side of William Street on the present 'Elders-G.M.' building's site.

Practically all those who took up land later in 1829 secured blocks on the south side of St George's Terrace. One of the main reasons for these choices would have been closeness to the river, the only means of transport until the first bush tracks were cut in the next few years — and even then, the cheapest and most popular.

The earliest recorded Perth town plan was printed as an inset on the Arrowsmith map, "Discoveries in Western Australia", published in London on 31 May, 1833, "from documents furnished to the Colonial Office" by John Septimus Roe, the Surveyor-General. The valuable locations taken up by the first grantees — L1 and 2, L3, L4, L5 and L11 and 12 — can be seen on this map. St George's Terrace ran from close to Mount Eliza eastwards almost to Point Fraser with its greatest length (in the east) overlooking land by the river reserved as a government domain. In the true sense, it was, therefore, a terrace. A careful check of the 1833 plan shows that the northern alignment of the terrace was not straight even then. There was a "kink" midway along it, which was to remain. No explanation was given at the time by Roe for this peculiar decision though several explanations have since been offered. The most likely seems to be that Roe built his house in the area now known as Adelaide Terrace before the accurate survey of 1838 was done. He owned blocks S9 and S10. His was the first house in that area and he built it in such a position that when the survey line was corrected it was found that the continuation of St George's Terrace would have gone through his house. So a slight bend was put in the road at the Lord Street (now Victoria Avenue) junction leaving his house north of Adelaide Terrace but his gardens on the opposite side. Such was the power of a Surveyor-General!

There was a northernwards extension of the government domain between Barrack Street and the present day Pier Street right through to Murray Street. It was designated 'Location B'. Though the next block northwards (between Murray and Wellington Streets) was not subdivided, it can be seen that the street blocks even further north, instead of maintaining the basic east-west pattern, were oriented north-south, a decision dictated by the presence of the lakes in the area. The blocks were so positioned that Barrack Street could not continue in a direct line to the north. The survey was never

altered in this regard so that once Barrack Street met Wellington Street (so named by 1838) it ended. Egress from there was made by Beaufort or Stirling Street. However, had this government domain not been subdivided later, Stirling Street would have entered the central square in the middle of its northern boundary, a striking concept.

Part of "Location B" on the 1833 plan was designated "Barracks and Goal". The Perth foundation ceremony on 12 August, 1829, was celebrated by the cutting down of a tree on the western edge of this square at a spot midway between St George's Terrace and Hay Street. Very near this spot, the first barracks for the 63rd Regiment were erected and hence the name of the street. (SEE PLAN.)

A serious problem had been faced by Roe and his surveyors in laying out the town in the relatively narrow area between the river and the swamps. What was to become Wellington Street lay along the edge of several of them. These "Fresh water swamps with rushy margins", as described in the 1833 plan, included Lake Kingsford on the site of the present railway station. To the east lay Lake Poulett, Stone's Lake and Ti-Tree Lagoon. North and west of Lake Kingsford were Lake Thompson (known also as Mew's Swamp), Lake Henderson, Lake Sutherland and Lake Irwin. Lake Poulett was sometimes called First Swamp. North of it lay Second Swamp, and further north Third Swamp, which was eventually to become Hyde Park.⁽⁴⁾ Further to the west lay Lake Georgiana, Monger's Lake and Herdsman Lake. Many of these were inter-connected and in the wet season the waters joined up, finding their way into the river via Claise Brook a mile north of Point Fraser.

In 1833, Samuel Kingsford, after whom Lake Kingsford was named, set up a water powered mill, driven by the waters he drained southwards from Lake Kingsford through deep cuttings he had constructed, some up to twenty feet deep. Lakes Sutherland and Irwin had been joined to Kingsford by open channels.⁽⁵⁾ His mill was located on allotment L20½, the site of the modern Parmelia Hotel, and thus the street running southwards on this frontage came to be called Mill Street. Kingsford also secured allotment V30½ at the southern edge of Lake Kingsford as well as L69, south of L20½, which took his land right to the water's edge. This lot is shown on the 1838 map but it has disappeared on the 1845 map. A jetty was built into the river across the mud flats at the foot of Mill Street by 1845.

He was not the first miller to use the waters from these lakes. Earlier in the year (1833) H.W. Reverley, the Colonial Engineer, had commenced operations a few chains east on lots L15 and 16. He used no channels but relied on seepage into an excavated mill pond to provide his mill with water power.⁽⁶⁾

The lakes were not much affected by the growth of the settlement in the first twenty-five years or so. However, in 1854, part of what had been Lake Kingsford was put up for sale. The lots were

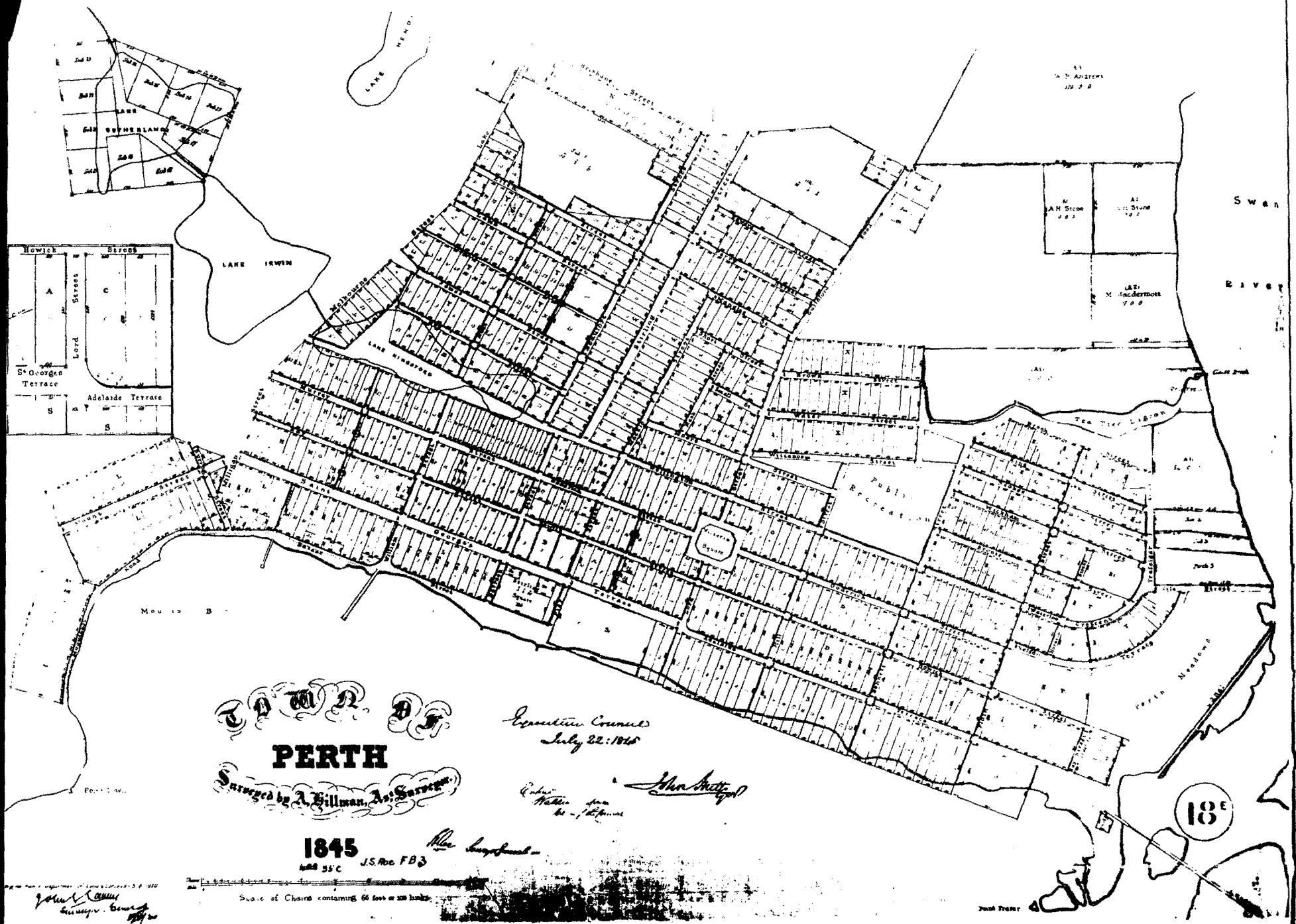
The "1838 Plan" of Perth:

Drawn in the colony by the Colonial Draftsman, Alfred Hillman, this plan was based on the first accurate "actual survey" and was drawn in February, 1838.

Note particularly the following:

1. The eastern part of St George's Terrace had been renamed Adelaide Terrace and allotments had been surveyed between it and the river.
2. Allotments had been surveyed at Belches Point (South Perth)
3. A group of islands made up what is now one island known as Heirisson Island. The largest of these had been granted to a settler, J. Furguson, and was 30 acres in area. The islands were linked by a dyke, which diverted water from the Burrowswood canal.

Courtesy Battye Library



The “1845 Plan” of Perth:

This plan was drawn by J.S. Roe in July 1845.

It showed the position of the Causeway running off at a slight angle to Adelaide Terrace and a new canal cut in the river bank slightly to the north.

Much of East Perth had been re-surveyed since 1838.

Note the four river jetties.

Pier street ran right down to the water's edge to a small pier — hence the name of the street. The street was closed some years later when the present Government House was erected in the 1860's.

Courtesy Battye Library

"situated in the bed of what originally was Lake Kingsford", which had "recently been drained and cleared of rushes".⁽⁷⁾ The drainage work had been done by the recently introduced convicts. The actual survey of these lots had been undertaken sometime between 1838 and 1845. The street then created between the earlier subdivision and the new lots was named Roe Street and still exists as such today. (SEE 1838 and 1845 PLANS.) A very wet winter in 1847 caused Lake Kingsford to flood into parts of Murray Street and to cover completely what is now known as Forrest Place. An open drain, Marr Drain, was therefore constructed on the north side of Wellington Street draining water to the east.

Murray had advised Stirling that.

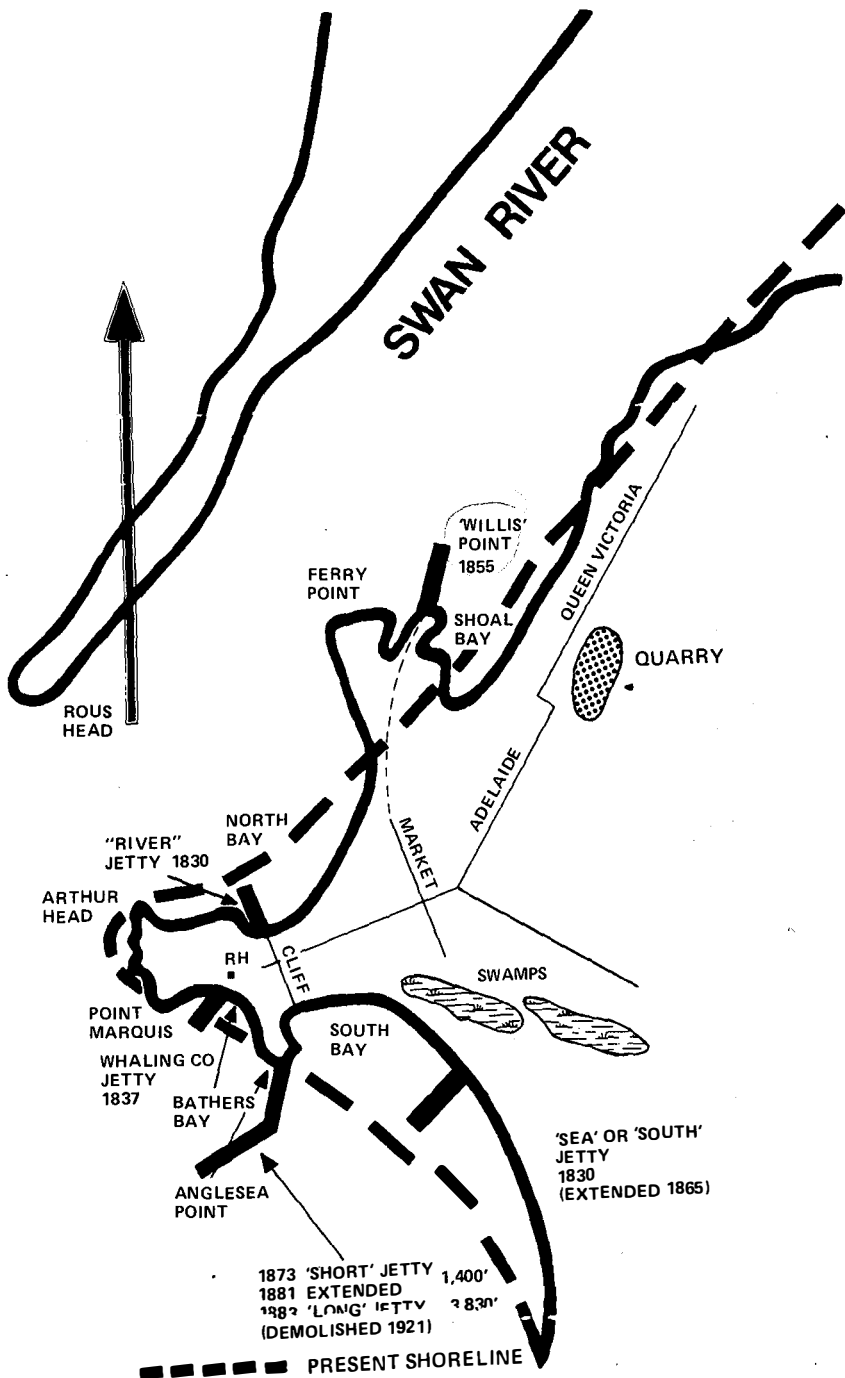
care must be taken to proceed upon a regular plan, leaving all vacant spaces, which will in future time be required for thoroughfares and as the Sites of Churches, Cemeteries and other Public Works of Utility and general convenience.⁽⁸⁾

The 1833 plan showed a large area of land reserved as the 'Church Square'. The Church of England, the Established Church, was to have been built on 'Church Square' which was the highest point in central Perth but it declined the offer because the distance was so great from the main part of town. Instead, in the first few months, the first church was built of timber and rushes on a site at the corner of Hay and Irwin Streets where the first church service was held on Christmas Day, 1829.⁽⁹⁾ This church had been built in less than three weeks by men of the 63rd Regiment. It was to be used for the next seven years and not only as a church, for on Saturdays the court sittings were held there and during the week it was used as a school. In the early 1840's an Anglican Church of St George was built in the government domain in the centre part of the block (SEE MAP). It was demolished when the present Anglican Cathedral was built in 1887.⁽¹⁰⁾ The original "Church Square" shown on both the 1833 and the 1838 plans was accepted by the Roman Catholic Church though no building was erected until the 1860's.

Roe made provision for a cemetery to the east of the town on a hillside overlooking Claise Brook — Location R, the East Perth cemetery, now gazetted as a park.

It should be noted that before private building started on the Perth townsite, the Surveyor-General had drawn up very detailed regulations specifying building requirements and standards. Of special note was Condition 4: "All houses are to be on the middle line of each lot and the front of the building to be 30 feet from the boundary of the lot on the street."⁽¹¹⁾ This was certainly not a requirement for houses built in a town at that time in England. Most houses there were built right to the edge of the block (partly because town lots were so small). The style dictated by Roe and Stirling was known as "cottage ornee", similar to the cottages of rural England, surrounded by their gardens. This style was to

SWAN RIVER





View of Fremantle, 1832

This is a copy of a water-colour, executed by a colonist, Richard Morrell in August, 1832, from the top of Church Hill.

Note particularly the following:

1. The three small lakes which lie in the centre of the town, surrounded by houses. They were soon filled in because they provided a breeding ground for mosquitoes and other pests.
2. The sea jetty in South Bay.
3. The 'Round House' completed within two years of the colony's foundation and its first jail.
4. Jetty Point which almost blocked off the mouth of the river. The point was not removed until 1897 when the present harbour was developed.

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Courtesy Battye Library

persist in Perth. Town houses, or row houses, were being built elsewhere in Australia at this time, particularly in Sydney, but at no time did they become significant in Perth though some were built during the last few decades of the century.⁽¹²⁾

In several other ways, styles were set early in Perth. Though the earliest houses were built of timber, or timber and pug (mud), bricks were soon in common use. For several reasons, timber as the main building material was quickly abandoned. Many early settlers had brought with them prefabricated wooden houses. Those not left to rot on Fremantle beaches were quickly attacked and destroyed by white ants. Writing in 1835, Irwin had this to say:

It may be here well to caution emigrants against bringing out wooden houses from England. They are very uncomfortable dwellings in such a climate, for not only are they liable to warp and shrink, and thus to admit too freely the external air; but, if constructed with ever such well-seasoned materials, they are rarely a sufficient protection from heat and cold. In a wooden house with a thatched roof, situated at Fremantle, Fahrenheit's thermometer stood 16° higher in the hot season than it did in a stone house close by.⁽¹³⁾

Until techniques of seasoning (and insulation) were better developed, the settlers secured little success with local timbers either. A final problem was the risk of fire, so great during the harsh summers and a terrible hazard when water mains were non-existent. W.L. Brockman's wooden house was thus destroyed in December, 1830, and this hastened the swing to stone or brick.⁽¹⁴⁾ Stone (limestone) was available from nearby Mount Eliza. Many early bricks came as ballast on ships. H.M.S. Sulphur carried 10,000⁽¹⁵⁾ and bricks were part of the cargo of the Marquis of Anglesea, wrecked in September 1829 on Arthur's Head. Bricks were made on the site of Perth but mainly at clay pits in the area now occupied by Queens Gardens at the eastern end of Hay Street. Early in 1832 bricks were setting at £ 2.4.0 a thousand but had dropped to £ 1.10.0 by the end of the year due to competition.⁽¹⁶⁾ Verandahs, too, became a feature of houses erected in early Perth. Was this a result of suggestions from the many army visitors from India in the early years? Verandahs were used not only to keep the houses cool in summer, but also to protect the walls against dampness in winter. It was not until the end of the century that the double brick cavity wall was commonly used.

During September, 1829, the civil administration was established at Perth. Temporary buildings were erected for the Colonial Secretary (Peter Brown), the Surveyor-General (J.S. Roe), the Harbour Master (M.J. Currie), and the Civil Engineer (H.W. Reveley). These were built near Stirling's cottage which was located not far from the present site of Government House.⁽¹⁷⁾ The location is shown on the 1833 map. All these buildings were erected south of St George's

Terrace in the government domain. In 1832 the buildings were abandoned and the government offices were established on the north side of St George's Terrace near Barrack Street.⁽¹⁸⁾

The survey of Fremantle was undertaken late in August, 1829 and completed on 18 September. The first official plan of an accurate survey was eventually drawn up by the Surveyor-General and submitted to the Lieutenant Governor, F.C. Irwin, for his approval on 20 March, 1833,⁽¹⁹⁾ since, at that time, Stirling was in England. It was a plan well adapted to the site, which was far more restrictive than that of Perth. North of the Fremantle site lay the mouth of the Swan River with North Bay biting into the peninsula. To the south lay South Bay. To the west rose Arthur's Head, a limestone prominence named by Stirling in 1827 in honour of George Arthur, Governor of Van Dieman's Land at the time, whom Stirling had met when the *Success* called at Hobart on its way to the Swan River.⁽²⁰⁾ It was a dominant headland composed of limestone and rising to a height of thirty feet. To the east of the Fremantle site, slightly less than a mile away lay a ridge of hills, two points of which were called Cantonment Hill (in the north) and Church Hill (in the south). (SEE MAP.)

Roe located his township within these confines. The main street, High Street, ran almost ENE along the narrow neck of the peninsula for a little over twenty chains until the peninsula began to expand. From that point two grids ran off at 45° on each side, one to the NE and one to the SE. Where William and Adelaide Streets met High Street, Roe created a square and called it King's Square.

Since the site was a peninsula and obviously more restricted in area than was Perth, the town was always more compact as it grew, a point noted by many early writers. Initially, a line of shallow swamps parallel to South Bay restricted growth even further but they were soon filled in and built over. These swamps are clearly shown in the water colour of the town painted by Richard Morrell in 1832.

As in Perth, regulations were quite specific about the requirements for permanent structures. Whereas in Perth, buildings were to be set back, in Fremantle, in the central part around High Street, they were permitted to extend right to the street line of the allotments, all of which were smaller than those in Perth. If no building was erected, the allotment had to be fenced with a "Parapet wall of stone, three feet at least in height."⁽²¹⁾ This requirement was partly a response to the problem of shifting sand, a fact commented on by many visitors:

Fremantle, of which it was wittily said by the quarter-master of one of His Majesty's ships who visited the place, "You might run it through an hour glass in a day" is but a collection of low white houses scattered over the scarcely whiter sand⁽²²⁾



FREMANTLE.

The First Official Plan of Fremantle, 1833

This plan shows how well the street plan was adapted to the restrictions of the site.

Note the reserve claimed by Governor Stirling on Arthur Head, a claim disallowed by the Colonial Office soon afterwards.

Courtesy Battye Library

A visitor the previous year, 1836, also remarked on the sand problem:

At the entrance to the Swan is the town of Fremantle where there are some good houses which were built in the first days of the colony: . . . many of them are half buried in loose white sand which drifts with every breeze and smothers the fences and even walls in the town.⁽²³⁾

Since Fremantle as the port of the colony was likely to be the main distributing centre for some time, five pioneer traders established stores there by the end of 1829: Leake, Samson, Bateman, Shenton and Henty. Lionel Samson acquired land in two areas. Since goods were initially unloaded from ships and boats in South Bay he built a warehouse on the foreshore at the corner of Mouatt Street. His other store was located at the far northern end of Mouatt Street on the corner of Phillimore Street near the first river jetty. The firm of L. Samson and Son was established in 1829 with a merchant's spirit license. Both the business and the spirit license are still in operation.⁽²⁴⁾ Leake set up his store next to Samson's on the corner of Cliff and Phillimore Streets whilst Shenton located further along Phillimore Street. John Bateman's store was located further east in Cantonment Road. James Henty secured a large holding and an ideal location – allotments 150, 151, 176 and 177 – between Essex and Collie Streets on South Bay very close to the first sea jetty.

Initially, Fremantle grew more rapidly than Perth despite the latter's status as capital and the government offices established there. Writing to Lord Goderich, the new Colonial Secretary, on 2 April, 1832, Stirling noted that the colony had a population of 1,497 of whom approximately 400 were in Fremantle and approximately 360 in Perth. Buildings in Perth were worth £ 10,000 and in Fremantle £ 15,000.⁽²⁵⁾ Five months later Captain Fremantle unexpectedly visited the colony again in the Challenger. He noted in his diary of 6 September, 1832:

Went on shore, found the Settlement of Fremantle with several houses built, mostly occupied by persons keeping Stores. . . I was much disappointed at the appearance of the Capital as it does not appear to have made much progress, very few houses having been built and many of those scarcely worthy of the name being mostly of wood and very small. . . Perth has not kept pace with Fremantle as the latter has many pretty tolerable houses and several are in progress and in spite of its sandy and unpromising appearance I have no doubt, if the Colony continues, of its being in time a place of Consequence.⁽²⁶⁾

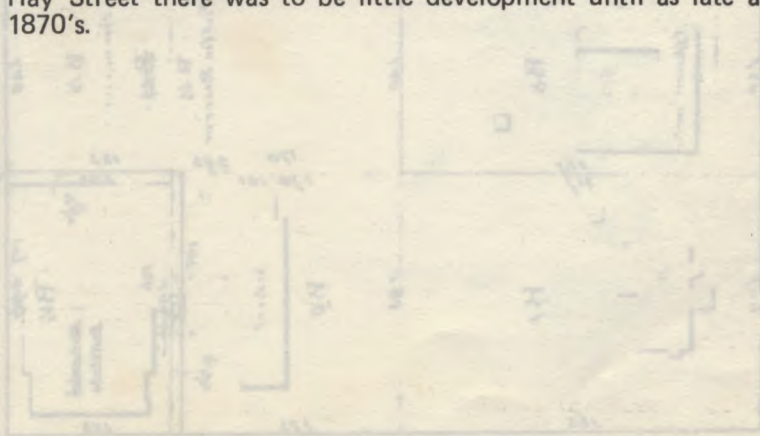
This piece of evidence is a little contradictory: "several" houses in Fremantle in the first sentence, but "many" in the last. It does, however, support the contention that, initially, Fremantle's progress was more rapid than Perth's. G.F. Moore provides a good account of

the changes made in the Fremantle between 1830 and 1832:

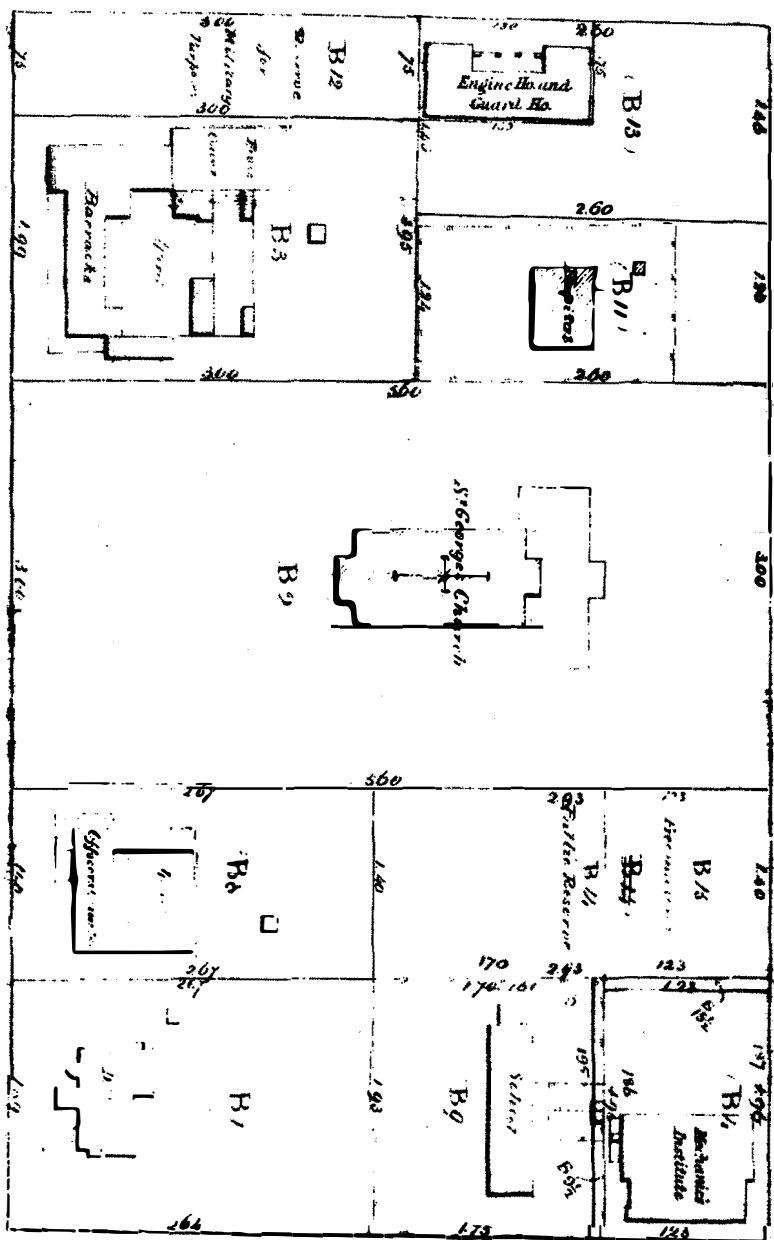
What was Fremantle then? [1830] A bare, barren-looking district of sandy coast; the shrubs cut down for firewood, the herbage trodden bare, a few wooden houses, many ragged-looking tents and contrivances for habitations. . . a few cheerless, dissatisfied people with gloomy looks, plodding their way through the sand from hut to hut to drink grog, and grumble out their discontent to each other; a stranger. . . could not admire the settlement. Now [1832] there is a town laid out in regular streets of stone houses with low walls, and in some places pallisades in front; two or three large, well kept inns or hotels in which you can get clean beds and good private rooms. (27)

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The condition of the two towns of Perth and Fremantle reflected in the early years (and continued to do so) the progress of the colony. For the first ten years in the colony progress was relatively slow, the population not exceeding a total of 2,000, other than military personnel, until 1839. Though the survey maps show that in each town hundreds of allotments had been laid out it must not be imagined that these were all alienated, let alone occupied. Neither town grew rapidly. Fremantle developed into a compact little sea-port with stores and hotels dominating the town because of its port function. Perth grew into a large straggling village with one main street by 1838. 426 allotments had been alienated by this time but very few of these were built on. Most of the houses stood alone, each owner having a garden or paddock of three quarters of an acre or so around his dwelling. By this stage Perth had begun to develop three distinct zones: to the west of Barrack Street lay the houses of business; a little to the east lay the government domain with military, judicial and administrative functions; further east, mainly along Adelaide Terrace were the private homes. North of Hay Street there was to be little development until as late as the 1870's.



Barrack Street



Pier Street

St. George's Church

St. George's Church

1857 Plan

Drawn 27 January, 1854, this plan shows allotments between Barrack and Pier Streets in the city centre.

The only building surviving today is the Deanery

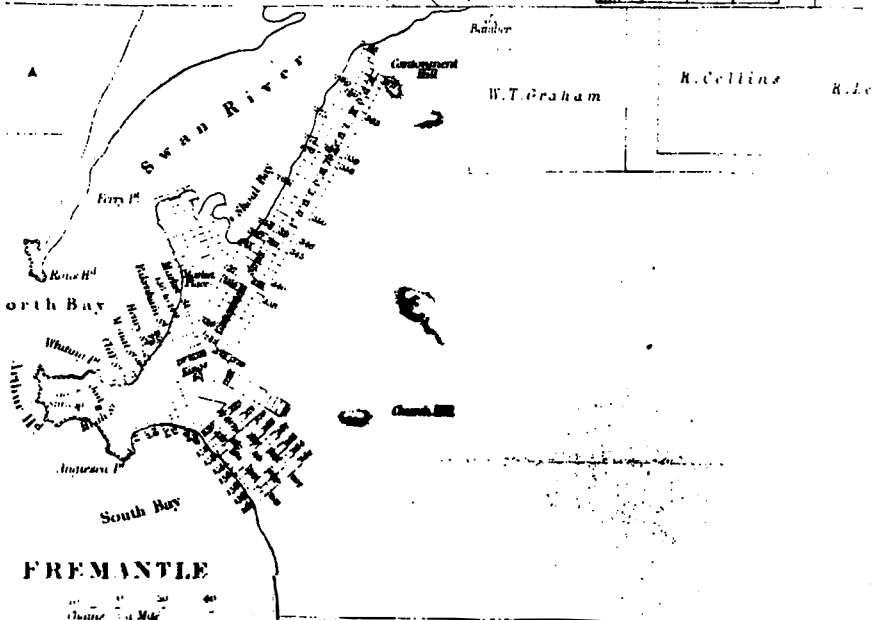
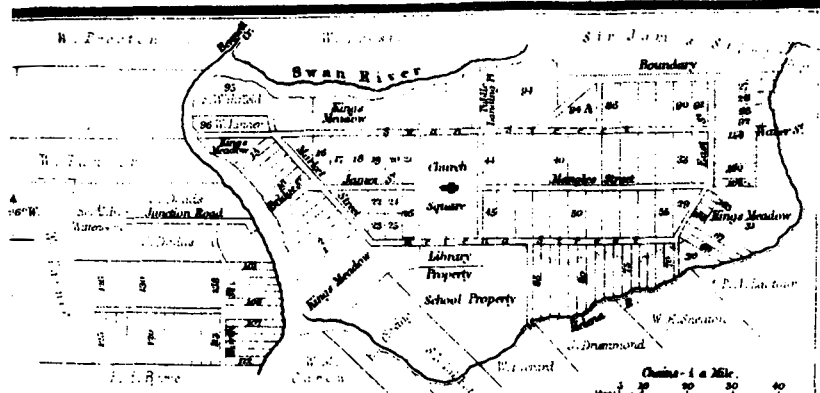
The Church shown is the old St George's Church built in the 1840's.

At this time, the Governor's residence was on the south side of St George's Terrace opposite the Barracks.

Note that east of Barrack Street, what is now Hay Street was called Howick Street.

Courtesy Battye Library

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Insets: 1839 Arrowsmith Map

These plans were shown as insets on Arrowsmith's second map of the territory of the colony.

The plan of Guildford shows the suburban allotments of ten acres or so which were often taken up by people of the working class. Many of these were farmed by indentured labourers brought out by Thomas Peel but released from their contracts when his venture failed.

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Courtesy Battye Library

CHAPTER 7. FOOTNOTES

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1. **Historical Records of Australia**, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 601.
2. J.S. Battye, **Western Australia: A History of its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth**, p. 85.
3. Sir H. Colebatch, (ed.) **A Story of a Hundred Years : Western Australia, 1829 - 1929**, p. 344.
4. Shown on a plan prepared by A. Hillman on 12 February, 1838. M. Uren, **Land Looking West : The Story of Sir James Stirling in Western Australia**, p. 169.
5. **Journal and Proceedings of the Western Australian Historical Society**, Vol. I, Part VIII, pp. 80-1.
6. pp. 73-7.
7. **Government Gazette of Western Australia**, 7 November, 1854, W.A.A.
8. **Historical Records of Australia**, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 601.
9. Uren, p. 178.
10. Colebatch, p. 436.
11. N. Ogle, **The Colony of Western Australia: A Manual for Emigrants to that Settlement or its Dependencies**, Appendix II, p. XIV.
12. G. Seddon, **Sense of Place**, p. 234.
13. F.C. Irwin, **The State and Position of Western Australia; Commonly Called the Swan River Settlement**, p. 50.
14. W.B. Kimberly, **History of Western Australia; A Narrative of Her Past, with Biographies of Her Leading Men**, p. 69.
15. V.G. Fall, **The Sea and the Forest: A History of the Port of Rockingham, Western Australia**, p. 191.
16. Kimberly, p. 78.
17. Battye, p. 91.
18. Kimberly, p. 78.
19. Plan of Fremantle, 20 March, 1833, W.A.A.
20. G. Seddon, **Swan River Landscapes**, p. 119.
21. Ogle, Appendix II, p. XVII.
22. J.L. Stokes, **Discoveries in Australia; With an Account of the Coasts and Rivers Explored and Surveyed during the Voyage of H.M.S. "Beagle" in the Years 1837 - 1843**, p. 50.
23. Lieut.—Col. W. St. Pierre Bunbury and W.P. Morrell, (eds.) **Early Days in Western Australia, Being the Letters and Journal of Lieut. H.W. Bunbury, 21st Fusiliers**, p. 25.

- 24.** J.K. Ewers, **The Western Gateway, A History of Fremantle**, p. 6.
- 25.** Stirling to Goderich, 2 April, 1832, "Swan River Papers" Vol. IX, W.A.A.
- 26.** Uren, p. 199 (emphasis added).
- 27.** G.F. Moore, **Diary of Ten Years Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia**, p. 150.

CHAPTER 8

THE EARLY PROBLEMS

97

By the end of 1829 Stirling was able to report to Sir George Murray that there were 850 settlers in the colony, as well as military and navy personnel.⁽¹⁾ Ten years later the population barely exceeded 2,000 and was still less than 5,000 in 1848, the year of the first official census.⁽²⁾ Yet this was the colony the famous *Quarterly Review* article of April, 1829, had described as containing millions of acres, "the greater part of which . . . may be considered as fit for the plough, and, therefore, fully capable of giving support to a million souls."⁽³⁾

Colebatch has described the early period of settlement as "tedious and difficult years", when there was a "pitiable contrast between promise and performance",⁽⁴⁾ and there is no doubt that this is a reasonable comment.

What had gone wrong?

Researches have offered various explanations of the near collapse and failure of the colony in the early years, particularly in the first decade. For some time it was fashionable to attribute problems to the manner in which land had been distributed. The disorganisation of the government, the quality of the early settlers and environmental factors have all, at different times, received different stress. It seems possible to consider the early difficulties under two basic headings:

1

HUMAN FACTORS

1.1 ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS

1.2 THE SETTLERS

2

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Though both of these broad groups of factors continued to operate for some time they produced an immediate reaction:

3

Early Unfavourable Publicity

The immediate response to this was an:

4

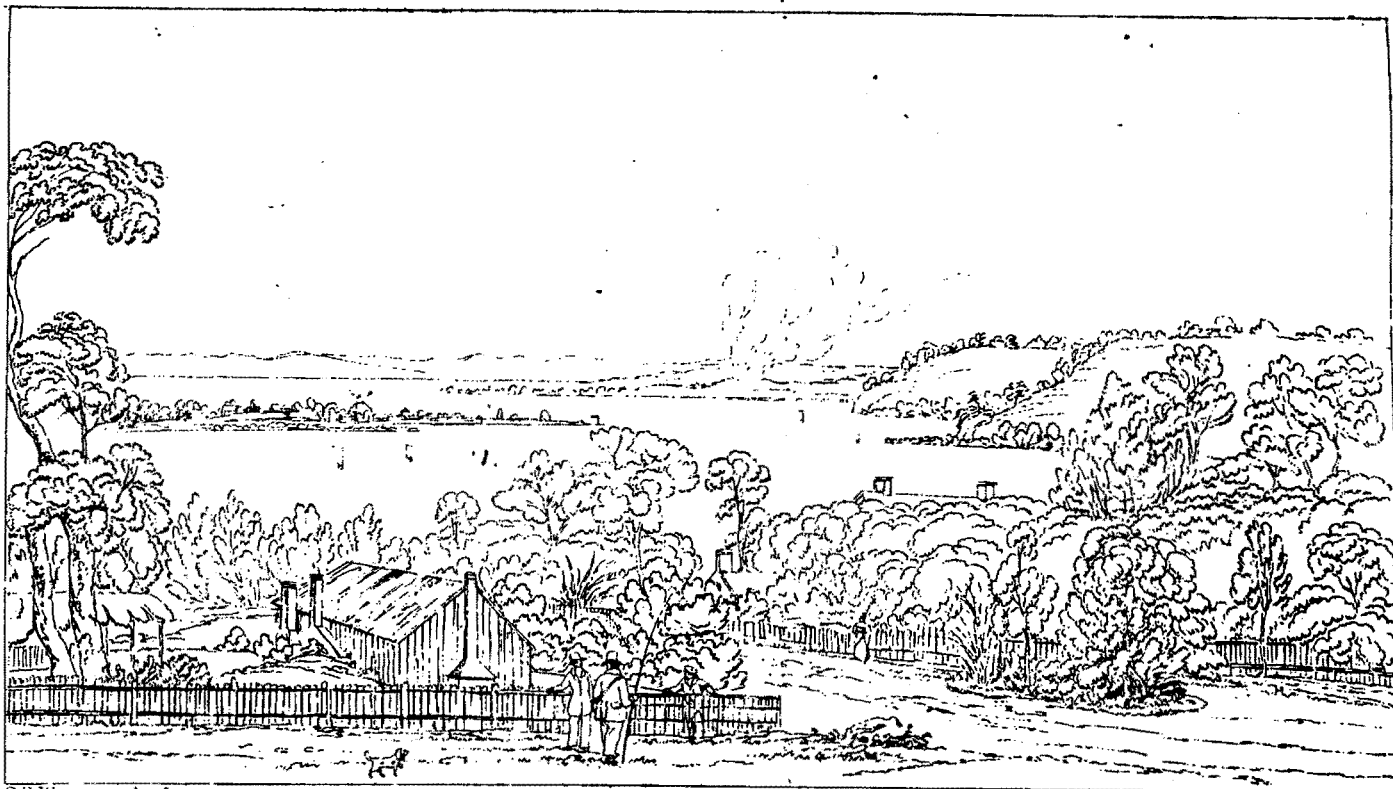
Immediate Cessation of Migration

It was the final factor that was the most significant, the most difficult to overcome, the one that ensured that little progress could occur.

Perth, Eighteen-thirties

This sketch, reproduced in Ogle's book, **The Colony of Western Australia**, published in 1839, was probably drawn about 1836 from a site most likely at the corner of William Street and St George's Terrace. On the point opposite can be seen Shenton's Mill.

Courtesy Battye Library



Perth — St George's Terrace

This is another sketch reproduced from Ogle's book.

The scene is somewhere in St George's Terrace or Adelaide Terrace.

Note the early appearance of verandahs.

Courtesy Battye Library

Before considering in detail any of these factors it must be stressed that most of the early problems were not, in themselves, insurmountable but they did provide, immediately, much unfavourable publicity for the colony. So people stopped coming. What the colony needed most was a large body of eager settlers who were determined to succeed. Without them the problems multiplied. Thus labour shortage was a critical factor in the early years. It need not have been so. So the cessation of migration emerges as one of the most vital factors, admitting of course that it would not have occurred had all else gone well.

HUMAN FACTORS

ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS

These were primarily:

1

The failure to provide any initial accommodation for people, goods and stock.

2

The failure to prepare surveys of land available for selection before the settlers arrived.

3

The failure to make available sufficient agricultural land to meet the demand.

4

The failure to allocate the land fairly.

In a monster address sent to Earl Grey, many of the first settlers listed what they considered to be the worst errors committed by the government:

The entire material of a settlement, the official staff, settlers, property and live stock, were hurried out to an unknown wilderness before one acre was surveyed, before one building had been erected, before even a guess had been formed as to the proper scene of their labours, before the slightest knowledge had been obtained of the soil, climate, products or inhabitants.⁽⁴⁾

These early settlers could not have imagined the lack of preparation and planning they were to discover when they reached the colony. A settler, writing from the Cape on the way out, had said: "After our arrival at the land of promise we shall probably find temporary homes prepared for us by the Tweed and **Challenger**".⁽⁵⁾ What a disappointment lay ahead!

Only the **Challenger** had preceded them, and she by only a month. She had arrived off Garden Island on 27 April but even then the weather was so rough that a landing could not be made until 2 May.⁽⁶⁾ Certainly no preparation had been made for the settlers known to be on the way. They too arrived in stormy weather and had to be put ashore on Garden Island some days later where temporary shelters were erected. Two months later on 10 August, most of the settlers were moved to the beaches near the mouth of the Swan River. Here, whilst winter storms raged, they waited in tents for land

to be allocated. The storm of 3 September was so severe that all seven ships anchored offshore were damaged. One, the *Marquis of Anglesea*, was completely wrecked. It can be imagined how tents and temporary shelters fared. Stores and possessions were damaged whilst some were totally lost. Many of the stock wandered off into the bush since no fences were there to restrain them. The situation was unbelievably chaotic and one can readily understand the immediate decline in morale. But worse was yet to come!

No surveys had been done before Stirling arrived and none were done immediately on land when he did arrive. Stirling decided, however, that an accurate chart of Cockburn Sound was needed. There is no doubt that it was needed, but his priorities may be questioned. It was the arrival of more settlers that caused Stirling to abandon this project and commence town surveys. Once completed, the surveys of rural land were undertaken. These were sufficiently accurate for settlers to be located on their farms along the Swan River banks on 1 October. Then, on 2 November, all land for fifty miles south of the Swan between the sea and the ranges was also declared open – land that Thomas Peel had had a claim to, but forfeited by his failure to arrive by a stipulated time. It is obvious that all this land could not have been surveyed prior to selection yet this requirement had been one of many conditions in the land regulations proclaimed by Stirling on 28 August and forwarded to Murray on 20 September, 1829.⁽⁷⁾

It is to his credit that Stirling saw the necessity to waive this requirement for the time being at least in reasons given to Murray on 26 January, 1830:

In the course of October, November and December some ships and many settlers came in. Their arrival before the country could be surveyed occasioned great inconvenience. Viewing no evil so great to the settler as delay in assigning to him his land, I was accordingly forced to grant locations on unsurveyed lands.⁽⁸⁾

Far more serious than the actual delays in allocating the land that was available on the Swan and Canning Rivers was the basic problem that there just was not sufficient land to meet the initial demand. This was an irony not appreciated by the settlers for about the only thing the British government had categorically promised it would supply was land! Everything else the settler had to supply for himself. The shortage of suitable agricultural land in the first few years was one of the colony's most serious problems – certainly the reason for many potentially suitable and competent settlers, such as the Henty's going elsewhere.

One of the early settlers, William Shaw, who arrived at the end of 1829, did not get land until 30 October, 1830. His wife had bitterly complained about the situation earlier that year:

The fact is simply this: All the land that is good for anything – and that is but a small patch here and there – is kept as Govern-

Inset, 1839 Arrowsmith Map of Western Australia.

This inset plan clearly shows the "ribbon grants" surveyed by Roe and his colleagues.

Most blocks run at right angles to the two major rivers, the Swan and the Canning, thus giving as many settlers as possible access to water transport.

It is obvious that Wakefield had seen no such map of the Swan River grants!

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Courtesy Battye Library

ment reserves, and what land is given, is given to Jews, stock-brokers, men-of-warsmen [naval officers], etc., and out of 1,800 souls now come to the colony in hopes of a living — or at least not being starved to death — there are not a dozen who know what they are to do or where they are to go.⁽¹⁰⁾

106 Exaggerated charges, but with some truth in them. In a country where land was virtually given away, new settlers could find no good land within months of the colony's inception.

James Henty arrived in October, 1829, with two of his brothers and thirty three servants as well as stores and stock. He was a big investor with a successful background in agriculture yet even he could not get land immediately. His investment entitled him to 84,413 acres. He failed to secure land on the Canning when Peel's original allotment was thrown open for selection. Before the end of the year he did secure a block of a little over 2,000 acres about three miles upriver from Perth but, Stake Farm as he called it, did not satisfy him.⁽¹¹⁾ In March, 1830, he was able to secure a grant of over 60,000 acres on the south bank of the Collie River in the Leschenault district but early in 1831 he gave it up since surveys still had not been carried out. A brief visit during midsummer had also indicated to him that little of the land was fit for cultivation. On 26 January, 1832, he left the colony for Van Dieman's Land, one of many who departed because they could not obtain suitable land.

The problem of not enough good land fit for agriculture was only to be solved by the opening up of new areas. This was done in the next few years. Perhaps the most damning statistic demonstrating the failure to get settlers on to the land in the early months lay in Stirling's report of January, 1830. Despite the presence of 850 persons resident in the colony and the allotment of 525,000 acres of land, only "39 Locations [were] actually effected."⁽¹²⁾

Probably the most serious, and perhaps the most justified, criticism of Stirling's governorship in the first eighteen months or so was his failure to allocate land with absolute fairness. It seems he erred in two ways:

1

Grants were given to many people who were not bona fide settlers.

2

Grants were allocated in a sequence other than the order of the reception of applications.

The first charge is supported by much evidence. A British Parliamentary Paper, Number 685 of 6 August, 1838, states that over a quarter of a million acres were granted to persons other than genuine settlers:

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Civil officers, 19 persons | : | 162,062 acres. |
| Naval officers, 16 persons | : | 33,680 acres. |
| Military officers, 11 persons | : | 30,862 acres. |
| Others, 16 persons | : | 60,880 acres. ⁽¹³⁾ |

A modern writer, normally sympathetic to Stirling has been critical of this aspect of his work:

he seems to have set apart too much land — and most of it in the better suited localities — for the military and naval officers and visiting master mariners, none of whom were likely to be settlers and all of whom were speculators. Probably they were closest to Stirling and he appeased them first; but he certainly erred, not only in giving them priority in the granting of land, but also in giving them so much. ⁽¹⁴⁾

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James Henty's first letter home to his father in October, 1829, had mentioned the grants to non-settlers. He told his family they "would be surprised to find that a quantity of land is already allocated; almost every officer both of the Army and the Navy stationed here and the Government Clerks etc. have grants generally from 1000 to 5000 acres." ⁽¹⁵⁾

Most of the officers of the Challenger and the Sulphur received grants as a reward for their services in helping establish the colony and also for undertaking explorations. Stirling's civil officers were often unpaid, or poorly paid, so they were given grants. Stirling, himself, took a small grant near the junction of the Swan and the Helena. ⁽¹⁶⁾

In July, 1830, Henty, in a fury because of the poorness of the soil on his small Swan grant, wrote to Stirling making accusations not only about the recipients of grants but also criticising the order in which they were allocated:

On my arrival, to my great surprise and disappointment, I found all the land on the Swan given away, except the utterly worthless and the Government reserves (although very few settlers had arrived before me). On referring to the plan at the Surveyor's Office, the grantees appear to consist principally of Naval, Military and Civil Officers.

He then went on to complain of the 2,000 acre grant he had obtained and added:

I am much less satisfied with my grant when I find a great number of individuals who had arrived in the colony subsequent to myself, put into grants far superior, which I was led to believe were given away before my arrival, though never occupied. ⁽¹⁷⁾

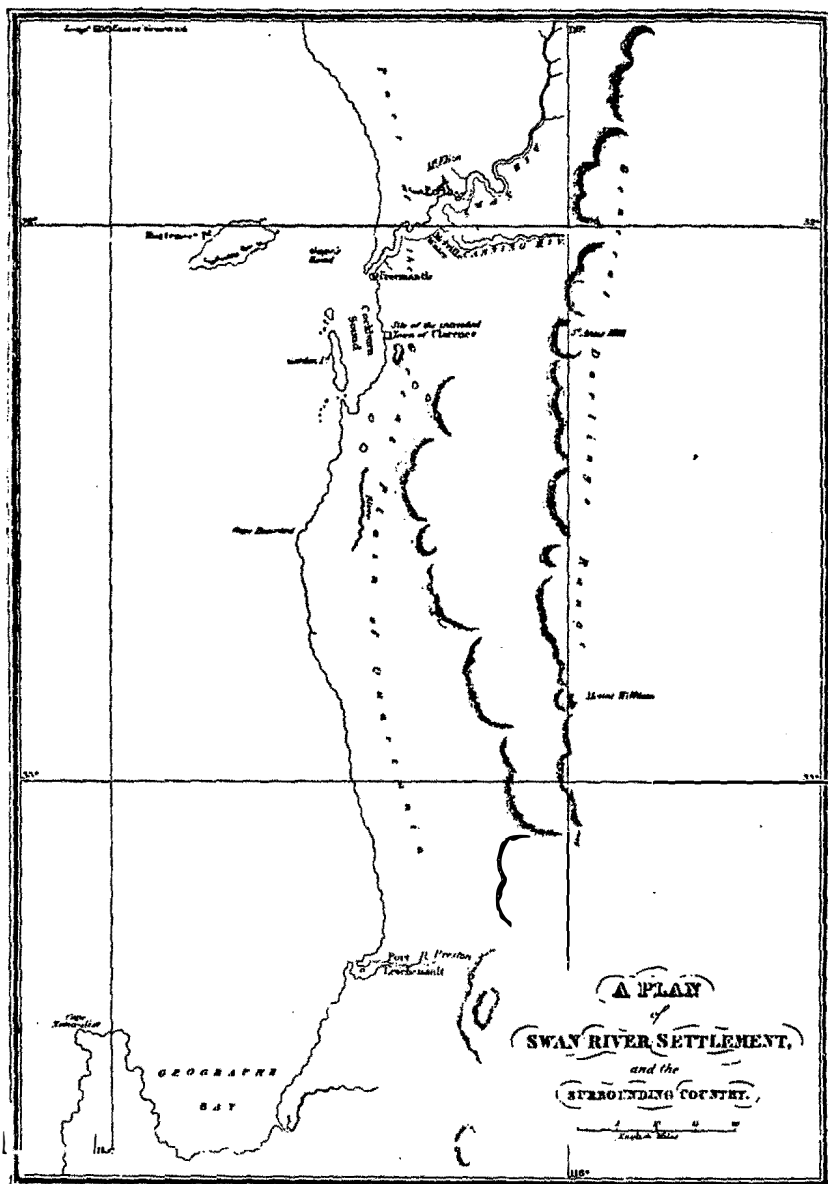
On the credit side of Stirling's administration of the land regulations are two extremely important decisions made before even the first land was alienated:

1

The restriction of river frontages.

2

The refusal to grant excessively large holdings on the Swan Helena or Canning Rivers.



1831 Map

This 'Plan of Swan River Settlement' was published in 1831 in the book **The Narrative of a Voyage to the Swan River** by the Rev. J.G. Powell.

Note the prominence given to the townsite of Clarence, originally intended as the centre of Peel's enterprise but soon abandoned.

The name "Great Plains of Quartania" along the coast between Fremantle and Bunbury fell quickly into disuse.

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Courtesy Battye Library

The regulations proclaimed on 28 August, 1829, limited the river frontage of a grant to no more than one-fourth of its exterior boundary. In practice it was usually far, far less than this. A grant on the Swan could only include one bank of the river, and even then no more than half a mile. On the Canning slightly more was allowed but still only on one bank. In order to permit the maximum number of settlers access to the river, Roe, in fact, surveyed long narrow blocks running far back into the country. No only did this give more people access to the river but it also ensured a fairer sharing of the better soils, mostly near the river banks. These long, narrow blocks, typical of the French colonial land alienation pattern came to be called "ribbon grants". So narrow were some that on the right bank of the upper Swan several ran back almost to the sea, one in fact into it because of an incorrect survey.

Stirling allowed no large grants in the vicinity of the Swan. The largest grantees were located elsewhere, principally in the southern districts. The average grantees were allowed to select on the Swan or Canning but were allowed only a small portion of their grant in these favourable areas. The rest of the grant land had to be taken elsewhere, usually "over the hills" on the Avon. Thus the large investors were not permitted to monopolise the most desirable areas. The accusation that "too few people got too much land too close to Perth" was invalid.

HUMAN FACTORS

THE SETTLERS:

The major sources of difficulty in regard to the settlers were:

1

The excessive expectations of the settlers.

2

The unsuitability and inexperience of the settlers.

3

The lack of suitable preparation by the settlers.

The most common characteristic of all the settlers who arrived within the first year was probably the high expectations they had, and, of course, they were quickly disillusioned.

Much disappointment has already been felt by many, who, from the favourable report they heard in England, expected to be immediately inducted into a land, if not "flowing — easily capable of being made to flow — with milk and honey."⁽¹⁸⁾

Stirling, himself, commented on this attitude:

People came out expecting to find the Garden of Eden and some of the working class were astonished at finding hard work an indispensable preliminary to meat and drink . . . all in fact were in a state of disappointment and some in despondency.⁽¹⁹⁾

The excessive expectations of the settlers had been created by a variety of factors: by Fraser's glowing description of the area, by the

propaganda of ship owners seeking passengers and freight; and primarily by the "Swan River Mania" initiated by the British press in 1829.

The settlers were not to be blamed for these expectations. The tragedy lay in the type of settler who had come as a result of this publicity. Since it had been most effective in the cities, nearly three-quarters of the colonists had had urban origins, at least half of them coming from within fifty miles of London and 23% from London itself. Most of the migrants were drawn from the lower middle classes or upper working classes.⁽²⁰⁾ Because of their backgrounds many of these settlers were obviously unsuitable as pioneers in such a venture as the new settlement. Kimberly has quoted from the diary of a settler who arrived in September, 1829:

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I was with no small surprise that I discovered not one passenger in ten knew anything about farming, although they all professed their object to be the acquisition and occupation of land. Several of them . . . scarcely knew wheat from barley.⁽²¹⁾

An early colonist, Shaw, made this comment: "The greater part of our Colonists are very unfit persons for the undertakings, in fact, they know nothing of what I term roughing it."⁽²²⁾

Many writers have demonstrated that 'a great number of the emigrants . . . were totally incompetent to undertake the management of land.'⁽²³⁾ Even Stirling noted late in 1829 that "many will be ruined by their own groundless expectations and helpless inefficiency."⁽²⁴⁾ Most of the settlers planned to raise crops yet few had farmed before and even fewer had ever supervised labour. This was a severe enough problem in itself but, unfortunately, unsuitability by temperament was just as common. Battye has said many workmen and servants "seemed to have been recruited from parish outcasts, or engaged without any reference to character, and . . . consequently caused great inconvenience" by their drunken and disorderly habits."⁽²⁵⁾

Because of both their excessive expectations as to the nature of the Swan River and their unsuitability and inexperience as pioneers, the preparations made by most settlers were totally inadequate. Many expected to be able to immediately cultivate land and had brought insufficient provisions. Even had agriculture been possible on landing it would still have been some time before crops were harvested.

The Perth Gazette of 28 June, 1834, outlined what had been a common situation amongst the early settlers:

their expectations [were] that a large, an unbounded, extent of fertile land in the immediate vicinity of the Swan and navigable rivers lay waiting for distribution, where abundance, independence and wealth were attainable by the simplest operations of husbandry or grazing. Hence, too large a part of their resources were expended in elegant preparations for this expected life of

ease and affluence; too small a reserve kept back for the possibility of failure or disappointment. As they were immediately to be fixed on their respective grants without delay or hindrance, too many goods were embarked of a bulky and perishable quality; as the land was to be highly fertile, and the climate favourable, a small stock of provisions only was deemed necessary for their sustenance until an early produce and increase of stock should set them at ease on this head. The stock embarked were of the most improved and expensive breeds, with a large supply of agricultural implements; some harps, pianofortes, ottomans, sophas [sic], and carriages, and not a few marriages, were fitted up and contracted for the situation.

Kimberly described the situation somewhat more lyrically: "A promiscuous list of unnecessary goods were strewn on the Fremantle beach — the relics of civilization which served to remind every new arrival of the foolishness of those who had gone before."⁽²⁶⁾

One of the early settlers, who arrived in November, 1830, with little capital but left years later very rich and owning 24,000 acres of land, recorded in his diary that it would have been better to arrive with primitive farming implements:

The great mistake committed by settlers has been bringing too many articles of machinery and implements which are not necessary, or suited to the soil. Some ploughs, cars [sic], saws and mill machinery are lying even yet on the beach. If I were coming again I should content myself with grubbing hoes, felling axes, spades, some kitchen utensils, plenty of provisions and a hammock; these would do to begin with. Those who brought great apparatus and stock were sadly burdened with the first and did know what to do with the second. Many of their cattle ran into the bush and were lost, and some of the more delicate died from want of care and fodder on shipboard or on landing.⁽²⁷⁾

Stirling, when he presented his first major report to Murray, expressed a general opinion of the settlers. His words were significant since he was normally an optimist: "The greater part [of the settlers], incapable of succeeding in England, are not likely to prosper here . . . Many of the settlers who have come should never have left a safe and tranquil state of life."⁽²⁸⁾

Landor, who arrived in the colony a little over ten years later, was to echo these feelings: "Nothing can be more absurd than to imagine that a fortune may be made in a colony by those who have neither in them nor about them any of the elements or qualities by which fortunes are gained at home."⁽²⁹⁾

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

What were the environmental factors that contributed to the difficulties of the early years?

Of them all, the nature of the soil was the one that drew the most comment. Captain Dance of H.M.S. *Sulphur*, writing to Twiss as early as September, 1829, accurately summed up the situation:

There has been so much injudiciously (I think) asserted about the luxuriance of the soil, that many who have already arrived, and seen no further than the immediate vicinity of the place where they have landed, have professed much disappointment and you will likely hear very exaggerated accounts from different sources.⁽³⁰⁾

Mrs Shaw who at that stage had travelled only within a few miles of Fremantle, was appalled at what she saw:

That man who reported this land to be good deserves hanging nine times over . . . The fact is this, each side of the river is nothing more or less than sand, white sand, incapable of being made to produce anything for the sustenance of man.⁽³¹⁾

James Morgan, the Government Storekeeper, secured a 3,000 acre grant on the Canning River of which he considered barely 10% was suitable for cultivation. He wrote a personal letter to Under Secretary Hay in March, 1830, giving a reasonably accurate statement of most of the lands granted by then:

The soil is generally too light, poor and totally worthless for it ever to be a great agricultural or grazing country and the strips and patches of good land too much detached from each other ever to support anything like a people.⁽³²⁾

His words were to be echoed by a new arrival a little over ten years later.

the soil of this country varies in a remarkable manner, sand, however, greatly predominating, and I do not think there is, taking the whole country throughout, one acre in twenty, though they may naturally produce scantily herbage for sheep and goats, worth cultivation . . . In the fertile tracts the general character of the soil is patchy, rarely continuing the same order over any great extent of ground.⁽³³⁾

The question of the quality of the soil was an important one and linked obviously with the availability of land. Intending settlers had not been promised possibilities of trade with the native inhabitants nor the prospect of mineral discoveries. But they had been promised land and, along with it, fertile soil. The pooriness of the soil in general, except along the upper reaches of the Swan and the foothills of the ranges was a critical factor in building the colony's early reputation for barrenness.

The colonists had also been promised a superb climate. Along with the poverty of the coastal soils, the severity of the first two winters was a major factor in discouraging the initial settlers. Violent storms raged throughout June, July and August of 1829 and then gave way to a totally unexpected hot and dry summer. The winter of 1830

was equally severe, floods occurring on the river flats with much loss of stock and property. In Cockburn Sound there were wrecks, the **Rockingham**, one of Peel's ships, giving its name to the surrounding area where she beached and broke up.⁽³⁴⁾

Unexpected though the extremes of summer and winter were, settlers soon adapted to them; and it was a healthy climate, as Stirling put it: "favourable to health in an uncommon degree is the undoubted persuasion of every one with whom I have spoken."⁽³⁵⁾

Probably the most severe environmental restrictions apart from the quality of the soil were the shortage of water in some areas and the paucity of pastures in most, neither of which were to be overcome completely in the early years. To these problems might be added that of poisonous plants.

The shortage of fresh water was never severe in the Swan area once settlers had learnt to anticipate the summer drought. Where surface water was lacking, or was brackish, wells were usually successful though isolated examples existed where this was not so. Dr J. Whatley successfully dug for water on his first attempt at Swan Location U despite the fact that the original grantee, Brookes, abandoned it after digging seven wells which yielded only salt water.⁽³⁶⁾ "Over the hills", water became more of a problem. A settler near Toodyay wrote that "want of water is our greatest drawback and the settlers have to send their sheep miles for water, and some districts have to be left altogether."⁽³⁷⁾

The poverty of the natural pastures on the coastal plain was a severe initial problem for the infant colony, and one that was impossible to overcome. Not only was the natural vegetation almost useless as fodder but it was also frequently poisonous. To their cost the early settlers were to discover eventually that Western Australia had more toxic plants than any other Australian colony.

The English novelist, Anthony Trollope, made a significant observation on the Australian environment after his visit in 1873. He commented on the lack of indigenous foods that could have been used by the early settlers and noted that all food needed by them had therefore initially to be imported: "The country . . . produced almost nothing ready to the hands of the first comers . . . It was necessary that all should be imported and acclimatised."⁽³⁸⁾

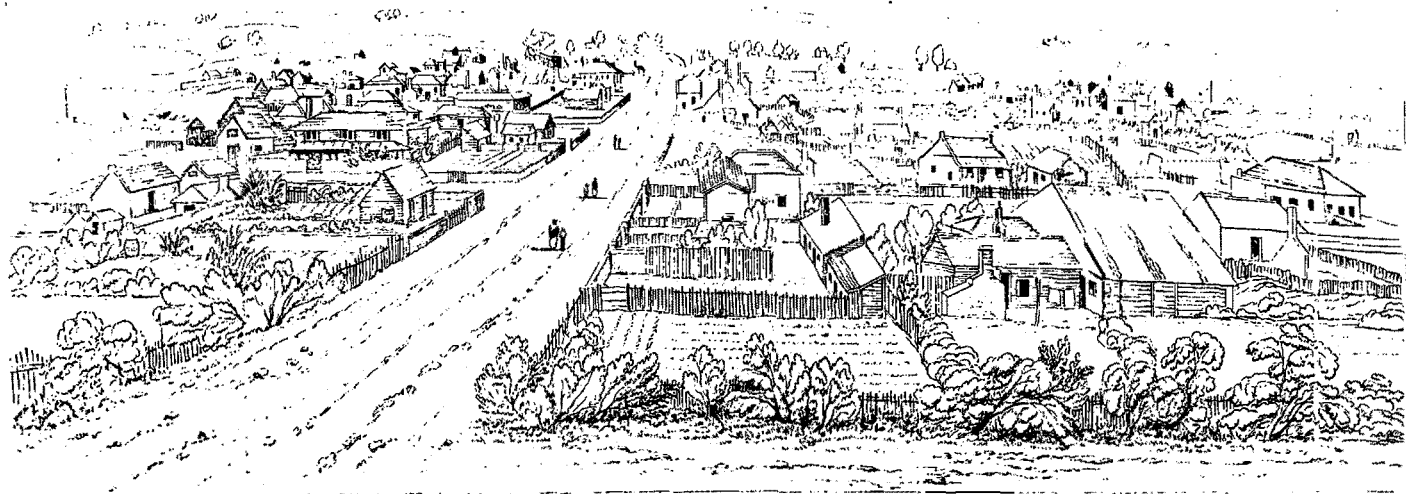
RESULTS OF DIFFICULTIES

Both human and environmental factors produced the early difficulties experienced by the Swan River Colony. The answer to the question as to which were the more significant is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to determine. The results of these factors are not so difficult. A recent researcher, J.M.R. Cameron, asserts that these early problems, when they became known in England, produced a great deal of unfavourable publicity. The direct and immediate result of this was the cessation of migration. Without a flow of settlers the colony languished:

The major long term effect of the feedback [the unfavourable publicity] was that it virtually isolated the colony so that its development was largely dependent upon the people and resources landed before the second half of 1830. It cut off the migration flow before it had properly developed. This left the colony with a socially and vocationally skewed settler group which had few of the skills necessary for effective and efficient colonisation. It had also reduced the possible size of the local market for primary production, thereby limiting the degree to which the economy could specialise, and had curtailed the population increase, a vital element of economic growth.⁽³⁹⁾

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The Swan River Colony was indeed experiencing problems in its embryonic growth!



VIEW OF BOSTON FROM THE MOUNTAIN, LOOKING SOUTH, APRIL 1864.
 WITH THE CHURCH & LA.

Printed by the Boston Public Library, Boston, Mass.

1830

Fremantle, Eighteen-thirties

This sketch was reproduced in Ogle's book **The Colony of Western Australia**.

It shows High Street viewed in all likelihood from the Round House in the mid-thirties.

Of interest is the extent of cultivation clearly visible on many allotments.

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Courtesy Battye Library

CHAPTER 8

FOOTNOTES

- 118** **1** **Historical Records of Australia, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 616.**
- 2** **F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, p. 17.**
- 3** **Quoted in: Sir H. Colebatch, (ed.) *A Story of a Hundred Years Western Australia, 1829 - 1929*, p. 15.**
- 4** **Colebatch, p. 15.**
- 5** **British Parliamentary Papers, 1849, (593), Volume XXVIII, p. 258.**
- 6** **Letter reprinted in *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 February, 1830.**
- 7** **M. Uren, *Land Looking West, The Story of Sir James Stirling in Western Australia*, p. 87.**
- 8** **Captain Stirling to Sir George Murray, 10 September, 1829, "Swan River Papers", Vol. III, W.A.A.**
- 9** **Historical Records of Australia, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 615.**
- 10** **Quoted in Colebatch, p. 51.**
- 11** **M. Bassett, *The Hentys; An Australian Colonial Tapestry*, p. 107.**
- 12** **Historical Records of Australia, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 616.**
- 13** **Colebatch, p. 46.**
- 14** **Uren, p. 106.**
- 15** **Bassett, p. 105.**
- 16** **Uren, p. 106.**
- 17** **p. 142.**
- 18** **T.B. Wilson, *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World*, p. 224.**
- 19** **Stirling Letters, 2 April, 1831, 449A, W.A.A.**
- 20** **J.M.R. Cameron, "Swan River Mania, 1829-30: A Study of the Relationship between Migration and Information". Proceedings of the Indian Ocean International Historical Congress (in press).**
- 21** **W.B. Kimberly, *History of Western Australia; A Narrative of Her Past, with Biographies of Her Leading Men*, p. 52 (emphasis added).**
- 22** **"Shaw Letters", B164, Mitchell Library, Sydney.**
- 23** **J.G. Powell, *The Narrative of a Voyage to the Swan River*, p. XI.**
- 24** **Captain Stirling to Sir George Murray, "Swan River Papers", Vol. IV, W.A.A.**
- 25** **Battye, p. 97.**
- 26** **Kimberly, p. 53.**
- 27** **G.F. Moore, *Diary of Ten Years Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia*, p. 26.**

- 28 **Historical Records of Australia**, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 621.
- 29 E.W. Lander, **The Bushman; or, Life in a New Country**, p. 6.
- 30 Captain Dance to Under-Secretary Twiss, "Swan River Papers", Vol. IV, W.A.A.
- 31 "Shaw Letters", B164, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
- 32 Uren, p. 149.
- 33 Rev. Canon A. Burton, (ed.) **Wollaston's Picton Journal, 1841 - 44**,
p. 6.
- 34 Kimberly, p. 55.
- 35 **Historical Records of Australia**, Series III, Vol. VI, p. 619.
- 36 Rev. Canon A. Burton, **The Story of the Swan District, 1843 - 1948**,
p. 3.
- 37 R. Erickson, **Old Toodyay and Newcastle**, p. 51.
- 38 P.D. Edwards and R.B. Joyce, (eds.) **Anthony Trollope: Australia**,
p. 565.
- 39 J.M.R. Cameron, "The Near Collapse of the Swan River Colony:
Review and Re-appraisal", **Social Science Forum**, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1973. pp.
111-12.

CHAPTER 9

THE EXTENSION OF SETTLEMENT

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Expecting fresh immigrants and yet finding it difficult to locate on the land even those who had already arrived, Stirling encouraged exploration of the surrounding districts in the latter part of 1829.

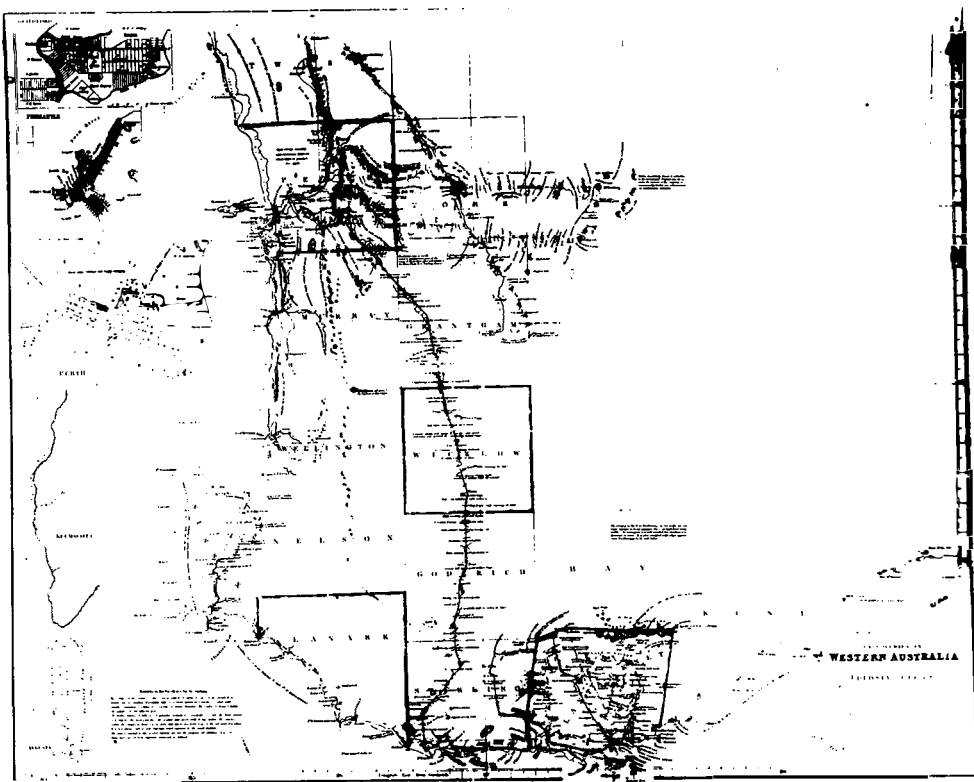
During November, Lieutenant Preston and Surgeon Collie, both from H.M.S. *Sulphur*, explored with two whale boats along the coast southwards from Swan River to Geographe Bay. They discovered two rivers (named later, by Stirling, after them) entering Port Leschenault and were favourably impressed with the soil they saw: "Port Leschenault... offered the best prospects of land in its vicinity, and the greatest extent of harbour."⁽¹⁾ They visited both the Murray and the Vasse as well on this trip but thought Port Leschenault the best proposition for settlement.

The month before, Ensign Dale of the 63rd Regiment had attempted to trace the course and origin of the Helena River but failed. On a second attempt in December, 1829, he succeeded. Though not very impressed with the soils he encountered as far as cropping went, he thought they supported fairly good pastures for sheep.⁽²⁾

Also in December, Dr Wilson, R.N., left Albany with a small party and travelled in a north-west direction. He observed some land "which would not suffer much by comparison with the best on the banks of the celebrated Swan"⁽³⁾ and much that was "as miserable and useless as any to be found in New South Wales."⁽⁴⁾ He discovered the Denmark River where he noted that the surrounding hills were "of very fine soil and may easily be turned to good account"⁽⁵⁾ as well as the Hay River. He was well satisfied with the results of this expedition which took him in a large loop north and west of Albany.

the area passed over contained as much, perhaps more, land fit for all rural purposes than any portion of equal extent (at least as far as I know) in New South Wales... the country is capiously supplied with water, neither is there a deficiency of several kinds of useful timber.⁽⁶⁾

There were no further explorations in 1829. Motivated by the results of the expedition by Preston and Collie, Stirling himself with a small party that included Roe, sailed in the hired schooner *Eagle* to explore Port Leschenault in March, 1830. So impressed was Stirling with the country that he took up a large grant in the vicinity. So did others. Colonei Labour took up 103,000 acres. James Henty, who had accompanied the expedition, was pleased with the quality



1833 Arrowsmith Map

Produced in 1833, this map indicates the 'known' areas of the colony at that time.

Courtesy Battye Library

of the soil and the good sheep pastures. Near the Preston River he discovered a level, open plain covered with grass and thinly scattered trees. In a map published soon after by Arrowsmith this was labelled "Henty's Plain." (It still is.) Henty wrote to his father about the land near Leschenault:

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The Collie running the whole way through this land has induced me to apply for a grant of 60,000 acres. I have seen no tract in the country at all to be compared to it. If possible I shall get a half mile of navigable frontage, and if so shall be within 12 miles of the Town and Harbour. The Governor has taken his own grant about 20 miles to the south and reserved for himself a delightful Villa Grant close to the Town for a Summer Residence adjoining which I am to have another. I have also the promise of a Town allotment.⁽⁷⁾

The area was described in an official government statement issued by Roe on 22 March:

The country inland from Port Leschenault, as far as it has been seen, offers fertile soil, and good stock stations. The climate is decidedly cooler than in this district; and judging from the quantity of grass and the verdure of the foliage it appears to sustain a dry season not so long in duration as that experienced in this quarter . . . All persons who may have claims under the present mode of distributing land, will do wisely to make an early selection in the territory thus laid open, as it is not intended to open other districts during the current year, at the end of which the present mode of distribution will expire.⁽⁸⁾

Stirling established a military station at Port Leschenault, on the spot where Bunbury now stands, before he left the area.⁽⁹⁾ Once back in Perth, he opened the area for selection. Despite government encouragement and many applicants for the land, no actual settlement took place. W.K. Shenton was granted 9,446 acres on 26 April on the north bank of the Collie opposite Henty's grant. Other grants in the area went to: Roe, 2,180 acres; Bamber, 4,500 acres; Sams, 4,500 acres; Padbury, 1,050 acres and Gellibrand, 12,226.⁽¹⁰⁾ Henty eventually withdrew his application. Latour did not in any way develop his grant and it was this land that was later to form the basis of the abortive Australind venture. Since settlers showed no interest in the Leschenault area, Stirling withdrew the military detachment at the end of the year.⁽¹¹⁾

In April, 1830, soon after Stirling's expedition to Point Leschenault, the country near King George's Sound that had been explored by Wilson was thrown open for selection. It was called Plantagenet Country. It attracted only a few takers, none of whom proposed immediate cultivation and most of whom were naval or military officers.⁽¹²⁾

Late in April, 1830, Stirling made yet another trip to the south. From the beginning he had desired 90,000 acres of his original

grant to be at Cape Naturaliste, an obvious indication of his interest in this region. On 29 April he sailed from Gage's Roads in the schooner *Emily Taylor* with a group of colonists intending to establish a settlement in the south. A site, chosen at the mouth of the Blackwood River in Flinders Bay near Cape Leeuwin was named Augusta. The settlers, amongst them Captain Molloy, the Bussells and the Turners, were landed and grants were selected. Roe's report of 11 May, 1830, was very optimistic of their success:

The position chosen for the new town possesses the advantages of excellent soil, plenty of good water, and easy access in moderate weather to the anchorage and to the interior country . . . The best soil, the finest blue gum timber, and some good grass, are to be found on the hilly lands; but even on the rest of the land there is generally food for cattle, and on the downs skirting the coast, fine sheep pastures . . . there is reason to hope for its considerable commercial progress.⁽¹³⁾

Roe's confidence was misplaced. The settlement struggled and was withdrawn, several years later, to the plains of the Vasse.⁽¹⁴⁾

An expedition in the hired cutter, *Colonist*, led by Lieutenant Preston, explored the coast to the north of the Swan River almost to the site of Geraldton in November of 1830. The report he brought back was distinctly unfavourable and so no moves were made for settlement in that area.⁽¹⁵⁾

Attention was also focussed on the area inland from the Swan across the ranges. In August, 1830, Ensign Dale led a small party that successfully penetrated to the east of the ranges and discovered the Avon River. He named the Dyott Ranges in honour of General Dyott, the Colonel of the 63rd Regiment, and its highest point he called Mount Bakewell "in compliment to a friend". To the north of it lay another peak which he called Mount Mackie, after the Chairman of the Court of Quarter Sessions.⁽¹⁶⁾ His report on the whole area was favourable:

The general characteristics of the soil of the country to the eastward of Mount Mackie, which we considered to be the eastern extremity of Darling's Range, was a light, sandy loam, the sub-soil of which was clay, which occasionally appeared on the surface. In some places there was a rich, red loam, and the banks of the . . . river were principally alluvial.⁽¹⁷⁾

The river was named the Avon. At this time nobody realised that it was in fact the headwaters of the Swan!

In September, 1830, Lieutenant-Adjutant Erskine travelled to the Avon taking a course slightly to the north of that taken by Dale. His report was also favourable.⁽¹⁸⁾

The next month Dale again crossed the ranges, this time with a much larger party that included the Governor, his cousin William Stirling and the Clarkson brothers, J.W. Hardy and H. Camfield.

Though the Governor journeyed only to the Avon at Mount Bakewell, Dale and six volunteers pushed further to the east beyond the Avon discovering "open forest land characterised by its growth of timber, with little brushwood below."⁽¹⁹⁾ Hardy, who had recently arrived on the **Tranby** and settled at Peninsula Farm, was most impressed with what he saw:

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The best soil I have seen since I left England is about the base of this hill [Mount Bakewell]; the grass, also, is truly good and thick set. The land walked over this morning is of excellent quality, generally speaking, very nicely situated, and well suited for grazing and agricultural purposes.⁽²⁰⁾

He went south from Bakewell with Dale to near the area now known as Beverley and was even more impressed.

[walked] about nine miles over the best land I have seen in the colony . . . the land here is very good and covered with grasses of excellent quality, even to the tops of the hills; and in a short time, this part will be found peculiarly applicable to breeding and grazing sheep and young cattle. In my opinion, I never saw a finer country for sheep.⁽²¹⁾

Stirling also was most impressed with what he had seen of the Avon district. He immediately threw the land open for selection — yet Port Leschenault was to have been the last area opened in 1830! Before the end of the year many large areas were taken up by settlers in the Avon valley particularly by those who had managed to get only a small part of their entitlement on the Swan or the Canning. Though no settlers actually moved into the area immediately, 223,077 acres was allocated as grants in the Avon between 25 November and 29 December 29, 1830.⁽²²⁾ In September 1831, Dale led the first settlers across the ranges to their grants on the Avon. He also explored further south along the Avon and then to the north where he discovered the fertile district soon to be named Toodyay.⁽²³⁾

Late in 1830 a major expedition was undertaken by Captain Thomas Bannister and three companions. They journeyed overland from Fremantle to King George's Sound, being the first to do so. Bannister wrote enthusiastically about the country around what is present-day Kojonup:

a very great proportion of this tract was land of the first description, fit for the plough, sheep or cattle . . . I cannot but think that the colony must possess a body of fertile land, of no inconsiderable magnitude, in this part of its territory.⁽²⁴⁾

It was not until June, 1835 that Stirling decided that a need existed for an overland communication between Perth and what by then was called Albany. (King George's Sound had become part of the new colony by a Proclamation in March, 1831.)⁽²⁵⁾ In October, 1835, Stirling, Roe and a large party explored the area in the region of the Hotham and Williams Rivers and then journeyed south to Albany. As

a result of this expedition the area around Williams was opened for settlement, M. McDermott taking up a grant of 25,000 acres,⁽²⁶⁾ in what was regarded as sheep country unfit for wheat. Stirling considered that much of the land he had seen was fine grazing country though he was disappointed that no large river had been discovered.⁽²⁷⁾

Because of this discovery of good sheep country Stirling was eager to open up the area which necessitated the provision of military protection and lines of communication. In May, 1836, Surveyor Hillman and Captain Armstrong sailed on the schooner *Sally Anne* to Albany and early the following year commenced the survey of a road from Albany to the Swan River by way of York.⁽²⁸⁾ A military outpost was sited at Kojonup in February, 1837,⁽²⁹⁾ though the first actual outpost was established under Armstrong at Warriup about thirty miles to the south.⁽³⁰⁾ It was moved to Kojonup in September, 1837.⁽³¹⁾

On a private expedition in April, 1836, G.F. Moore, who had proved the Avon to be part of the Swan in 1834, proceeded northwards from the Swan along the base of the Darling Range and discovered the river which was named after him.⁽³²⁾

For the next decade or so the great bulk of exploration was to be that undertaken by private individuals. They were usually men from the settled districts looking for new grazing lands. Gradually the gaps were filled in so that by the middle of the century the south-west had been thoroughly traversed.



Western Australia, Eighteen Forties:

This map, drawn in the early eighteen forties indicates the extent of exploration at that time.

Courtesy Battye Library

CHAPTER 9

FOOTNOTES

- 130 1 J. Cross, (ed.) **Journals of Several Expeditions Made in Western Australia During the Years 1829 - 1832**, p. 46.
- 2 p. 32.
- 3 p. 15.
- 4 p. 18.
- 5 p. 21.
- 6 p. 25.
- 7 M. Uren, **Land Looking West; the Story of Sir James Stirling in Western Australia**, p. 133.
- 8 Cross, p. 88.
- 9 p. 80.
- 10 W.B. Kimberly, **History of Western Australia; A Narrative of Her Past, with Biographies of Her Leading Men**, p. 57.
- 11 J.S. Battye, **Western Australia: A History of its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth**, p. 102.
- 12 p. 101.
- 13 Cross, p. 91.
- 14 Battye, p. 102.
- 15 Cross, p. 73.
- 16 pp. 55-8.
- 17 p. 61.
- 18 pp. 82-97.
- 19 p. 72.
- 20 p. 212.
- 21 p. 217.
- 22 Kimberly, p. 60.
- 23 Cross, p. 155.
- 24 pp. 100-01.
- 25 F.K. Crowley, **Australia's Western Third**, p. 9.
- 26 G.F. Moore, **Diary of Ten Years Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia**, p. 286.

- 27 p. 293.
- 28 M. Bignell, **First the Spring, A History of the Shire of Kojonup**, p. 1.
- 29 p. 18.
- 30 p. 19.
- 31 p. 20.
- 32 Kimberly, p. 108.

First the French and then the British had used the Swan River as a means of access to the Swan hinterland. Partly because Stirling located his port at the mouth of the river on its left bank and his capital twelve miles upstream on the right bank he helped ensure that this should continue to be the main routeway. The river was to continue as the most important means of transportation and communication until at least the time of the rail link-up in 1881.

In the very early years certainly the river was virtually the only means of communication between Perth and Fremantle. Because the long sand bank projecting into the river at Point Walter lengthened the journey a canal was cut through the spit in 1831. This reduced the distance by almost two miles.⁽¹⁾ The shallow channel was cut close to Point Walter where an inn was soon established. It was called Half-Way House and was owned by a family named Caporn. Because of this, Point Walter was often called by the locals: Cape Horn.⁽²⁾ (The Colony boasted three such Half-Way Houses by the late thirties!)

The mud-banks north of Point Fraser posed a more serious problem for water communication between Perth and the upper Swan locations. These were the flats over which Stirling had been forced to drag his boats on his first visit in 1827. Early settlers faced the same problem. Because they relied so much on the river as a routeway, Stirling ordered that channels be cut through the flats as well as a canal through the nearby peninsula on the left bank.⁽³⁾ This peninsula had been allocated along with some adjacent land to make up a grant of 1,000 acres for Henry Camfield on 13 November, 1829. Originally Stirling had nominated this peninsula as a government reserve though he had not specified its purpose. The nearby peninsula on the opposite bank had also been reserved as a racecourse. Camfield had arrived on the *Caroline* and been unable to secure a grant on the Swan. He was an experienced farmer with a knowledge of hop-growing and had attracted Stirling's favour. Roe was instructed to make the left bank peninsula available to him.⁽⁴⁾ It is interesting to speculate whether Stirling was interested in getting under way the cultivation of hops as a means of forestalling the rise in importance of spirits as the common drink. When Camfield took up his grant he named it Burrowswood after his father's farm in England.

At the time the channels were cut in the mudflats just south of this property a canal was cut through the narrow neck of the peninsula

itself. Thus Burrowswood Farm became an island. Though barely a quarter of a mile long, this canal shortened the distance between Perth and Guildford from twelve miles to nine miles.⁽⁵⁾ When the channels were cut the spoil was used to build dykes linking the group of islands known as Heirisson Islands. The dykes as well as the canal are clearly shown on the 1838 Perth Plan. The object of the dykes was to control the river flow in such a manner that the canal would be scoured so as to maintain a reasonable depth of water. The modern Heirisson Island was created from dredged mud between 1921 and 1935.

The alternative to the river as a means of communication was one of the land routes. These all required the use of a ferry at some point and by 1834 three of these, with ferries pulled across the river by horses, were operating on the Swan. The most used ferry operated from Preston Point (often called Ferry Point) a short distance upriver from Fremantle and on the same bank. The ferry crossed the river in a northerly direction, a distance of about four hundred yards. Irwin commented on this route in 1835:

In going by land from Fremantle to Perth, the traveller follows the road to Preston Point, which is a mile and a half higher up on the estuary; where he finds a horse ferry to take him across to the opposite bank, from whence there is a road leading directly to Perth. This road is through a sandy tract, generally loose, and mostly an open forest. Midway there is a good hotel, built of stone, and two stories high.⁽⁶⁾

Landor rode this tract in 1841 and one wonders what Irwin meant by an "open forest":

The old road to Perth was truly a miserable one, being at least six inches deep in sand the whole way. It was scarcely possible to see more than fifty yards ahead of you, so thickly grew the banksia trees. After crossing the ferry we lost sight of the river for several miles.⁽⁷⁾

The good hotel mentioned by Irwin was another Half-Way House. It stood at the present day junction of Stirling Highway and Napoleon Street where the Albion Hotel now stands. The land on which it stood was Swan Location 84 of 250 acres given by Stirling to John Butler on 10 January, 1838, "in consideration of certain . . . duties performed to the satisfaction of the governor." The inn had been his original farm house, built in 1830.⁽⁸⁾ As can be seen from the 1841 Beagle Map the Perth road ran on through what are today the suburbs of Claremont and Subiaco.

From Perth a road ran to Guildford along the right bank:

The distance by land from Perth to Guildford is but seven miles. The road is on the right bank of the river and having bridges over the brooks and ravines, there is communication for carriages, but from the sandy nature of the ground the travelling is heavy.⁽⁹⁾

The 1833 Perth Plan shows the Guildford Road leaving Perth via what is now Lord Street.

Another horse ferry crossed the Swan slightly north of the Helena River junction so that travellers could reach Guildford.

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Most of the locations on the Canning could also be reached by water, being about twelve miles from Perth. The principal farms were about six or seven miles up the river which was much narrower than the Swan and also impeded by mud flats. The Canning locations could be reached by road from Fremantle, Guildford and Perth by the early thirties. The road from Fremantle was cut through the bush as early as 1833 and probably followed very closely the route of the present day Canning Highway. Irwin described the other roads as they were in 1835:

One of them sets out from the point opposite Mount Eliza [Point Belches], where there is a horse ferry. This is a bush road used by carts, and the distance to the chief farms is about ten miles from the point. The other road goes round by Guildford, from whence this is still eight miles further to cross to the Canning. There is a shallow lagoon midway from Guildford, but, having a hard bottom, it represents no serious obstacle to the traveller.⁽¹⁰⁾

There is some disagreement as to the exact location and nature of the first crossing over the Heiresson Islands at the eastern end of Adelaide Terrace. From early accounts it is obvious that there must have been what amounted to a ford in the area near the present Causeway. Though passable in summer it certainly would not have been so in winter, even for horsemen. In 1839 the Governor accepted the need for a road to Guildford on the left bank of the river where the soil was firmer and where many settlers lived. It was commenced in July, 1840, and on 2 November, 1840, the first pile was driven for the Causeway itself.⁽¹¹⁾

But where was its site? A passage in Mrs Camfield's diary of 5 September, 1841, notes: "When the bridge and causeway are completed which are to unite several small islands until we get to our island, then . . ."⁽¹²⁾ The "our" island would be Burrowswood Island. Irwin also refers to the fact that "it is intended to take advantage of the proposed dam, and carrying the road across there . . ."⁽¹³⁾ If this evidence is acceptable, then the first Causeway ran in a north-easterly direction, the north-eastern end being at least two miles north of its present location. The Arrowsmith map of 1838 showed the Causeway as running eastwards but it had not even been built by then. Whatever its actual location, the route was in operation by 1842.

What were the land routes leading to areas other than the Swan valley?

It is likely that a track ran south from Fremantle to the holdings of Peel and others on the Murray by the early thirties though communication by sea would have been more common. What came to be known as the Old Coast Road was operating to Bunbury by the end of the thirties and in 1841 became, for a time, the major route used for the mail track between Perth and Albany via Kojonup.⁽¹⁴⁾

The 1833 Perth Plan showed a road leaving the western end of St George's Terrace to the north. This was the link with the "Great Lakes" area (also called the Large Lakes), those lakes north of Herdsman Lake where Leeder and Mews were the largest landholders in the early thirties.⁽¹⁵⁾

The only other road of major significance during this early period was the one that linked the Swan region with the settlements "over the hills." Ensign Dale had already made two trips to the Avon when he led the first group of settlers across the ranges on 6 September, 1831.⁽¹⁶⁾ Dale went ahead and blazed trees along the route, axemen who followed cleared the trail and behind them came the waggons. It took eleven days to make the fifty miles or so trip from Guildford.⁽¹⁷⁾ He reported to the Governor:

From the nature of the country, I was induced to alter in a slight degree the line of direction which it was proposed to follow [With waggons following, he needed to consider gradient] and it was satisfactory to find that the course pursued brought us directly to Mount Bakewell, the distance of which was found by the measurement to be forty-two miles from Green Mount.⁽¹⁸⁾

The York Road as marked out by Dale became the colony's first major road and was, for a time, called King Dick Road (a name shown on maps until 1889). Apparently it was named after a native who had acted as Dale's guide on one of his trips. It also came to be known as York Green Mount Road to distinguish it from the Toodyay Green Mount Road. Near the area known as the Lakes the colony's third Half-Way House, an inn, was built within a few years. There was an inn also at Mahogany Creek and one at the "Nineteen Mile" along the York Road.⁽¹⁹⁾

For several years after the first settlers moved into the Toodyay valley on the Avon, access was by means of the York road and tracks that ran NNW from York along the river valley. A more direct route was obviously needed. In May, 1836, this new route was blazed by Drummond, Whitfield and the Andersons, all of whom had received grants in the valley. Three miles from Guildford on the York road⁽²⁰⁾ the Toodyay road branched to the north, paralleled the ranges for a short distance and then ascended them at Red Hill. The original connection with the Toodyay grants was via the Jimpeting valley but soon after a more direct route was adopted at the Toodyay end.⁽²¹⁾

Costs of transport were a crippling factor in the economy of the early settlers. It was an enormous advantage in the early years of

settlement to have access to the sea or navigable waterways because of the primitive means of land transport. The cost of transporting goods on the Swan and Canning and to the settlers along the south coast was certainly high but it did not match the cost to the settlers over the hills. In 1841, the cost of taking a ton of goods from Fremantle to York was £ 25. This cost was almost nine times greater than it cost to bring the goods from England to Fremantle.⁽²²⁾

CHAPTER 10

FOOTNOTES

- J.K. Ewers, **The Western Gateway, A History of Fremantle**, p. 13. **137**
- 2 H.S.G. Downey, **Mosman Park, Western Australia**, p. 22.
- 3 W.B. Kimberly, **History of Western Australia; A Narrative of Her Past, with Biographies of Her Leading Men**, p. 78.
- 4 Rev. Canon A. Burton, **The Story of the Swan District, 1843 - 1948**, p. 3.
- 5 Kimberly, p. 91.
- 6 F.C. Irwin, **The State and Position of Western Australia; Commonly Called the Swan River Settlement**, p. 50.
- 7 E.W. Landor, **The Bushman; or, Life in a New Country**, p. 64.
- 8 Downey, p. 15.
- 9 Irwin, p. 52.
- 10 p. 62.
- 11 Kimberly, p. 118.
- 12 Burton, p. 12.
- 13 Irwin, p. 52.
- 14 F.K. Crowley, **Australia's Western Third**, p. 22.
- 15 N. Ogle, **The Colony of Western Australia: A Manual for Emigrants to that Settlement or its Dependencies**, Appendix XIV.
- 16 T. Pelloe, "The York Road", **Journal and Proceedings of the Western Australian Historical Society**, Vol. 1, Part 1, 1929, p. 1.
- 17 p. 2.
- 18 J. Cross, (ed.) **Journals of Several Expeditions Made in Western Australia During the Years 1829 - 1832**, p. 155.
- 19 Pelloe, p. 7.
- 20 R. Erickson, **Old Toodyay and Newcastle**, p. 20.
- 21 A. Hasluck, **Unwilling Immigrants; A Study of the Convict Period in Western Australia**, p. 86.
- 22 Erickson, p. 31.

CHAPTER 11 AGRICULTURE

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A basic problem for the early agriculturalists in the new colony was to discard European attitudes and preconceptions.

They learnt to adjust relatively quickly to such obviously different aspects as the inversion of the seasons, the total unfamiliarity of the weather pattern and the unique flora and fauna. It took longer to appreciate the vacillation between drought and flood. But perhaps their greatest problem lay in soil evaluation. They brought with them the belief that soil could be assessed by the vegetation it supported because this was a method that had worked for them in Europe. To them trees were an index of soil quality: Soil that could not support trees would not support crops. This was to colour the first appraisal of some of the more open savanna encountered 'over the hills' as well as the coastal plain. To some degree, though, it must be granted that the limits of technology were also a factor as this belief was also to retard the exploitation of the open, treeless prairies of North America.

The problem for the settlers in the south-west of Western Australia was the fact that soil fertility in many cases was in inverse proportion to the tree height. Thus the densest forests of jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*) were restricted to quite poor soils — mainly lateritic gravels and leached sands. Until, by trial and error, the new settlers came to grips with the problem of assessing soil fertility more accurately, they made some terrible mistakes. The costly venture at Augusta was but one example.

The problem of coping with the flora of a new environment was demonstrated by the poison plant problem. The most toxic plants were the genera *Oxylobium* and *Gastrolobium*, which were widespread and lethal. Unfortunately they were members of the pea flowered family (*Papilionaceae*). Settlers, acting on their past experience, believed therefore that their leguminous properties made them valuable as a fodder for their flocks. They sought them out and thus ensured the death of their stock.

The 'land' problem dominated the thinking of all the early settlers. They wanted to obtain a suitable grant as soon as possible. To them, "suitable" meant land with good soil (as far as they understood what good soil was) but it also meant one near the major centres of settlement, particularly Perth and Guildford.

Despite this thinking it soon became obvious to a number of the early settlers that two important factors would produce, not concentrated, but dispersed settlement. Those factors were the widespread

distribution of good soil and the need to develop a new type of agriculture. These settlers were quick to acknowledge that the type of farming they had practised in England would not suffice in this strange new land. Those who were to become successful agriculturists accepted three basic controls that were to restrict and limit agriculture for most of the century and even beyond in some areas. The controls were: the patchiness and general poorness of most of the soils, the dry summer and the occasional drought, and the almost impossible task of clearing heavily timbered areas. These factors then, determined the location of the early settled districts.

It is worth noting that most of the adaptations had to be made more or less in a vacuum. The links of the colony were with England and not with the longer established eastern colonies. Where English techniques were inadequate, new ones had to be devised, usually by means of trial and error. Very few innovations were imported from the eastern colonies, with which the links were rather tenuous and, on occasion, unfortunate. Their climates were so significantly different that any advice offered was of little value. They had, as well, virtually no experience with poisonous plants. About the most important contribution made in the early years was the despatch of scab infected sheep, a disease that was to be a costly curse for many years!

From the inventories of equipment, stores, provisions and stock brought with them as well as from their letters and diaries, it is evident that the earliest settlers planned to undertake the usual British approach to agriculture, known now as "mixed farming." For the first five years or so this is what was carried on by all the farming colonists. By the mid-thirties a different form of agriculture had begun to emerge and was to flourish during the period under consideration. By 1850, it was possible to differentiate three broad approaches to agriculture:

1

Mixed farming with an equal stress on both crop and animal production.

2

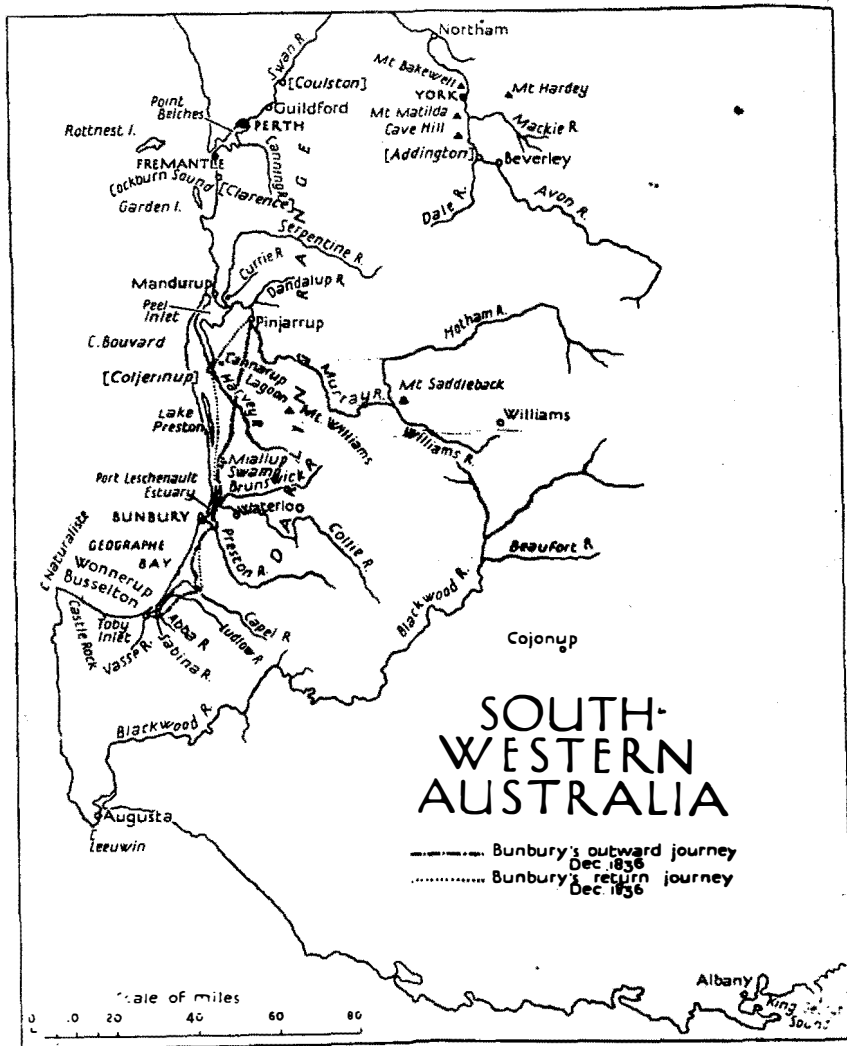
Pastoralism with a limited amount of arable farming.

3

Pastoralism.

The change from what had been the original intention of the settlers was due both to a recognition of the potential of the environment and to a response to the continuing problem of a labour shortage. Stirling commented on the situation in his report to Lord Glenelg on the colony's progress in 1837:

Agricultural and pastoral pursuits are the leading occupations in this country . . . The further extension of tillage is impeded by the want of labourers; and the very high wages demanded, compel those who principally depend on hired workmen, in rural occupations, to seek the means of employing their capital in pursuits less



Bunbury, 1836.

This map from **Early Days in Western Australia; Being the Letters and Journal of Lieut. H.W. Bunbury, 21st Fusiliers**, by Lieut. Col. W. St. Pierre Bunbury and W.P. Morrell shows clearly most of the areas settled by 1836.

Lieut. Bunbury served on garrison duty for two years in the colony.

Courtesy Battye Library

dependent on the whims and caprices of the labouring class. In consequence of this, the raising of wheat will be confined to those families, the members of which are sufficient for the work of the farm on which they live; and the higher class of settlers will endeavour to invest their means in the rearing of live stock.⁽¹⁾

Ten years later Landor echoed these sentiments:

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Sheep flocks constitute doubtlessly one of the most profitable investments for the employment of capital, notwithstanding the many obstacles and discouragements still thrown by governments in the way of the wool grower. They yield a very large return to those who attend to them in person, and who confine their attention entirely to that pursuit, growing only corn enough for their own consumption.⁽²⁾

MIXED FARMING

Mixed farming was the first agricultural response on the Swan, Helena and Canning Rivers and continued to be significant in those areas almost to the end of the century. Elsewhere stock raising, mainly sheep but sometimes cattle (as at the Vasse) tended to be more important.

The crop and animal combination was carefully balanced by the farmer and both elements were considered to be of equal importance. Had the farmer not kept some stock, he would have been without fertiliser for his crops, since animal manures were all that were used for many years. Had he not grown crops he could not have kept some animals such as pigs, for in an economy where money was very scarce and almost lacking, he could not have readily purchased grain.

The field crops grown were wheat, barley, oats, Kaffre [sic] corn (a type of millet), maize (often called Indian corn) and potatoes.

Land had first to be cleared and this was usually accomplished by means of an axe, sometimes with the aid of horses or bullocks if the farmer possessed them. The trees were then burnt on the spot, not always an easy task as Moore noted: "It may appear a trifling job to burn a tree, but it is not so. I have been ten days trying to burn one, and only a third part is consumed yet."⁽³⁾

The ground was then ploughed: "I superintended the burning of trees on the ground, which we shall commence to plough on Monday. Our practice, after the trees have been consumed, is to plough the ashes in, and let the ground lie fallow."⁽⁴⁾ The settlers were aware that ashes improved soil fertility: "My outfield of wheat is almost a failure, but wherever there were ashes a good patch appears."⁽⁵⁾

The ploughing was done with a single furrow plough drawn by either horses or, more often, by bullocks. But for some years neither was common because of the severe shortage of draught animals. As late as March, 1832, Moore was writing that although he was able to put

in three acres of wheat he still had not procured animals for his plough.⁽⁶⁾ When ploughs could not be used, the fields were laboriously trenched with a spade or simply hoed. Of course that was a tedious and lengthy process. Moore calculated that it took one man twenty days to hoe an acre of ground.⁽⁷⁾

Usually manure was spread on the fields before they were ploughed. All manure from the animals on the farm was carefully conserved for this purpose. It was collected in piles in the farmyard, usually treated with lime and then carted out to the fields where it was raked over the soil. Samuel Moore (the younger brother of G.F. Moore) kept a farm journal wherein he stressed frequently the need to pay careful attention to the preparation of manure as a fertiliser.⁽⁸⁾ Many farmers learnt to fold the sheep in a regular pattern across what was to become cropland so that the soil could benefit from the sheep manure:

Folding sheep certainly manures land better and cheaper than anything else, but it should not be done until near seed time as the heat of the summer sun dries up and destroys the virtue of the manure. One night's folding is sufficient for most land — two for poor land — but care must be taken in wet weather to shift the fold daily, and to the driest land, to avoid footrot among the sheep.⁽⁹⁾

Settlers experimented a great deal with sowing grain crops at different times to find the ideal month. Moore, in 1832, when farmers had had a very limited experience of the climate, made this surprising comment in his journal: "in a small patch on Captain Irwin's flat produced [wheat] last year (sown in October and reaped in December) at the rate of 48 bushels per acre."⁽¹⁰⁾

Bunbury, who was in the colony for almost two years from March, 1836, noted that settlers soon learnt to sow their wheat as soon as winter had broken. As time went on they sowed even earlier — as soon as possible after the first rains:

From the two seasons I have seen I have no hesitation in saying that the sooner the seed is in the ground the better, after sufficient rain has fallen for the land to be broken up with the plough . . . Here it is too much the habit to defer the sowing until July or even August when it is evident, as little or no rain falls after September and the sun immediately parches up the land, that the crops must be very light and short in the straw and the grain small and badly filled out.⁽¹¹⁾

Wheat was "pickled" prior to seeking to control diseases, the principal one being smut. Samuel Moore tersely noted in his journal the farm activities for May: "[wheat should be] pickled in strong brine to float an egg one third above the solution . . . too much trouble cannot be taken."⁽¹²⁾ Thomas Henry visited the colony early in 1834 a few months after smut had played havoc in the wheat crop. In an article he wrote for the *Perth Gazette* on 8 March, 1834, he

suggested an alternative recipe based on his thirty years of successful farming in England. His pickling mixture was of lime and boiling water. (He also added a warning against sowing wheat in succession on the same land, a practice adopted by the early settlers because of the difficulty in clearing land for cultivation.) Before the end of the decade a more successful pickle using blue-stone (copper sulphate) was introduced.

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The grain was sown by hand. It was broadcast on the ground by a man who slung an open bag of grain before him and then strode with carefully controlled steps towards a sighter-pole at the far end of the field. Sometimes the sower followed the plough, dribbling seed into the furrow. It was covered with the earth turned over by the next furrow. Though used elsewhere, drills were not in common use until almost the end of the century. One of the greatest threats to the successful seeding of a field was the depredation of birds, and, in particular, the crow. Techniques to dissuade the too-friendly crows were quickly adopted:

I tried today the plan of ploughing wheat into the ground [after it was broadcast]. The crows will not get at it so readily. They are very destructive. We hire natives, if we can, to walk about and keep them off.⁽¹³⁾

Bunbury noted another advantage from ploughing in the seed: "the wheat being deeper buried than by the harrow is perhaps a little longer coming up, but its roots retain the moisture longer."⁽¹⁴⁾

Once the wheat had germinated and grown several inches it was usually rolled. This caused the plants to tiller (grow extra stems) and also served to press down the soil which the settlers mistakenly believed preserved the moisture beneath from the heat of the sun. The same result, tillering, was achieved by allowing sheep to lightly graze the crop.

Harvesting was done by means of a sickle (reaping hook) or scythe – for grain only a sickle was used whilst the scythe was used if hay was wanted as well. Using either implement, one man could cut about one acre in a day, whilst one man could bind the grain cut by six men. He usually tied the sheaves with a twist of straw. Groups of sheaves were stooked (stacked upright) in the field as the harvest progressed. When completely dry they were carted to the barn where they might be threshed immediately or stored until the grain was required.

The sheaves were usually threshed in the barn or on hard, smooth ground. A wooden flail was used, one man threshing five or six bushels a day. Sometimes horses or bullocks were used to trample out the grain. The straw was kept for thatching, bedding in stalls or to be made into chaff.

The grain had to be cleaned finally by winnowing. Various techniques were used. The grain was usually poured from a dish at shoulder height onto a piece of canvas in a light breeze which blew

away all but the grain. It could also be tossed in the air by means of a long-handled wooden shovel. Machinery was introduced in the early forties, driven either by hand or by horse, to do the winnowing. The first hand driven winnowing machine was made in Australia by John Stokes Bagshaw in 1838. It consisted of a huge iron wheel turned by a handle to provide a jet of air across riddles. This freed the grain from the chaff.⁽¹⁵⁾ It was not long before stationary steam engines supplied the motive force.

The stripper was invented in the early 1840s by John Ridley in South Australia. This machine was first used in Western Australia by Major Irwin at his Henley Park property on the Swan. He imported a stripper in 1844 and considered it a failure, probably because he used it on crops not completely ripe. It was used the same season by the Burges brothers and the Lefroys at York, again with limited success. During the next season it was used with greater success since experience had shown it worked best on a thoroughly ripe crop.⁽¹⁶⁾

Because it was so expensive to buy, the stripper was not in widespread use for many years, particularly whilst individual crop acreages remained small. Its great advantage was the performance of two processes at once. The ears of grain were gathered into a comb at the front of the machine where they were taken off by a revolving cutter or beater. Other beaters then threshed the ears, the chaff being blown away by air from a fan. The stripper, sometimes called the 'locomotive thresher' was pushed from behind by two horses or bullocks. The comb could be raised or lowered by an operator but he could not see it properly from his driving position. Often the comb jammed or choked with straw. The machine tended to slip sideways if the land was not flat; it was difficult to steer even on level ground and the driving belts frequently came off. With more experience and some modifications, most problems were overcome.

Because they feared they might lose their jobs, farm labourers resented the new machine. Before the harvest of 1845 parts were stolen from Irwin's machine rendering it inoperable.⁽¹⁷⁾ Whitfield imported another stripper in 1845. It was used very successfully on his property at Toodyay.⁽¹⁸⁾

The yields of grain achieved varied enormously amongst the settlers and were dependent on a number of factors: soil, time and method of planting and the district, which affected the climate. Irwin noted that the crops raised at York were "not equal in quantity to the produce of the rich alluvial plains of the Swan, Canning and other rivers in the coastal districts."⁽¹⁹⁾ Referring to wheat crops on the Swan, he noted:

A piece of alluvial land, measured with exactness, and sown with wheat, gave the first year a produce at the rate of forty-three bushels, and the second year, of nearly sixty-one bushels to the English acre, without the aid of manure.⁽²⁰⁾

Referring to York at about the same time, Bunbury stated that 'twenty to twenty-five bushels of wheat per acre is reckoned a good crop.'⁽²¹⁾

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Bountiful crops of other grain were also grown. Moore, as early as 1832, had grown a bumper crop of oats on his Swan grant: "Some of my oats, which have been cut, were **seven feet high**, well-headed, and heavy: they were produced upon ground merely ploughed over once and harrowed without manure."⁽²²⁾

A crop grown often in the first few years, mainly as stock feed, was 'Indian corn' or maize. Gradually it was replaced by Kaffre corn, imported no doubt from the Cape. It was discussed in the Agricultural Society report of 1834 when it was stated that:

Kaffre corn appears to be almost entirely superceding maize, the former being found not only productive, but answering well on inferior soils; whereas the latter does not succeed well in this country, without a great deal of manure, except on soils that are moist in summer.⁽²³⁾

The settlers were fairly quick to note the fertility of some of the sandy soils that they had initially avoided. Late in 1831, Moore wrote.

Mr Brockman has had fifteen acres in culture — a great quantity under existing circumstances — and he as well as others have happily experienced that the sandy soil, at first despised, produces as well as stiff clay, and with infinitely less trouble.⁽²⁴⁾

Several years later Irwin also acknowledged the change in people's attitudes compared with their initial appraisal:

The sandy lands, which have more or less of loam in them, are becoming more valued every year, and heavy crops of wheat and barley have been had from them with the aid of very little manure. Some of the land which gave this return, bore, when in a state of nature, the grass-tree only, and was cultivated solely from it being near the farmer's residence. The productive powers of even inferior sandy soils are often extraordinary, and show what the combination of heat and moisture effects in this country.⁽²⁵⁾

No longer was the lack of dense and tall trees linked with an expectation of infertile soil!

In the early years farmers cut hay from natural pastures as a supplement for stock during the lean months of autumn. It was an arduous business and was still being undertaken in some areas in the forties.

Wollaston's Diary, 17 November, 1842 records:

On Monday I went into the bush with George and William (about seven miles) to cut hay. This is only to be found in patches near water and has to be carried to one spot, stacked there and when settled, cut into trusses and carried home.⁽²⁶⁾

The greater yields from cultivated hay quickly became known and, when land was available, settlers soon began to grow their own hay. From a comparable area the yield was usually four or five times greater and the hay itself was certainly more nutritious. In all areas natural hay eventually gave way to cultivated hay as the pressure on the land increased:

There is very little natural hay to be found now — the grounds formerly covered with it are now fed down by cattle or ploughed for crops. It is all artificial, and the oat hay is the best we have; it renews itself and remains in the ground like grass.⁽²⁷⁾

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All farmers endeavoured to grow their own supplies of vegetables. The most common crop and a staple item of diet was the potato which was found to grow well in most conditions. Most settlers could grow at least two crops a year if they had some land that remained moist in summer. A perusal of the diaries of early settlers shows that by far the most common vegetables grown other than potatoes were cabbages and radishes. Moore's diary refers more often to his garden than to any other farming activity in the first few years. He listed the vegetables he was growing in May, 1832, as turnips, cabbages, rape, potatoes, carrots, borecole, radishes, spinach, peas, lettuce, mustard, onions and tomatoes. In August the same year he had:

planted thyme, sowed coriander and red pepper seed and planted almond trees six feet high (which I obtained from a gardener in Perth at one shilling a piece), twelve sets of sugar cane, strawberry plants, some Cape gooseberry and rose-tree cuttings and a few slips of the Cape or Hottentot fig.⁽²⁸⁾

The settlers were very quick to notice that vines flourished in the colony's Mediterranean climate and cuttings were planted in all areas to which settlement spread. Landor was impressed by the extent of grapevine cultivation in 1847:

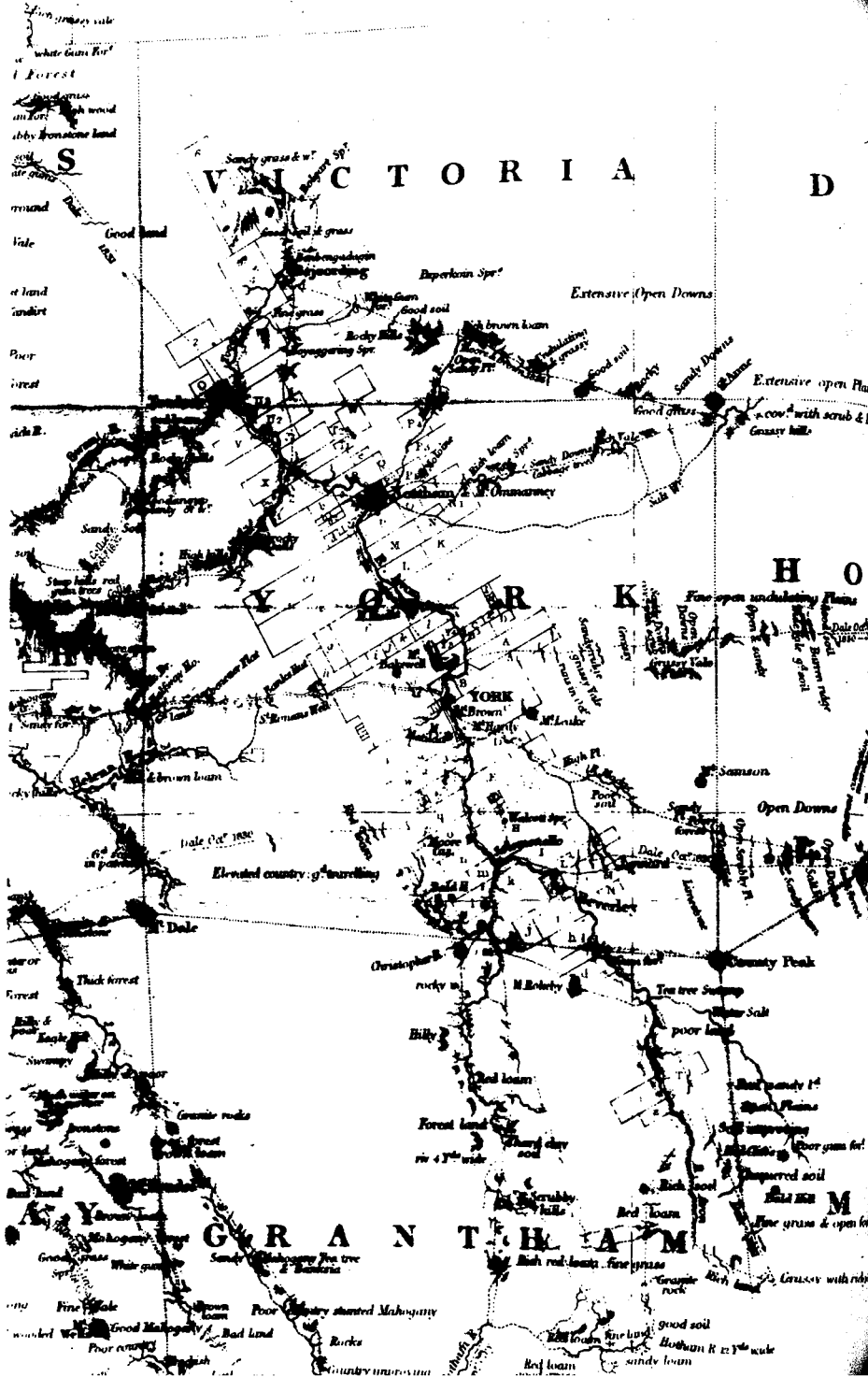
There is every reason to believe that Western Australia will one day become a great wine country. Its vineyards are becoming more numerous and extensive every year . . . Every farm-settler is now adding a vineyard to his estate.⁽²⁹⁾

Many settlers also planted olives.

As they became more familiar with the potential of the various soil types and with the seasonal pattern of weather, problems such as bush fires, the shortage of labour (which had always been a serious problem), the need for fencing and so on concerned the farmers more. One problem that seemed to occur in all districts with devastating effect — and remained as a problem until relatively modern times — was an insect pest, the caterpillar.

Typical reports were:

On the Swan (1831): "On my return from the mountains [the Darling Ranges] . . . I discovered all my turnips were eaten off



1839 Arrowsmith Map

This is an extract from Arrowsmith's map of Western Australia produced in 1839.

It shows that "ribbon grants" were also used on the Avon. The reason for allocating land in this manner was not to make available the means for water transport but to give settlers access to the river water during the summer months when the river became a series of pools. In the drier areas "over the hills" drinking water for both humans and animals was often in short supply. Land allocated in long blocks like this also shared the better soils more equably.

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Courtesy Battye Library

by the caterpillars, also my cabbages, also my potatoes in part.”⁽³⁰⁾
 On the Swan (1837): “A spot in a field of barley seemed greatly affected, the heads appeared to have been broken short off, and were lying on the ground. It appears to be the work of caterpillars, which are found on the ground in great numbers.”⁽³¹⁾

On the Preston River (1842): “The caterpillars have done and are doing much damage. They appear all at once in considerable multitudes.”⁽³²⁾

The stock kept on the farms were of many kinds. Horses were used for transport and as draught animals though cows and bullocks were also used for this purpose. Frequently the first large animal secured by a settler was a cow simply because it not only gave a source of food but could also be used to pull a wagon or plough. As time went on cattle were kept solely for dairy purposes and as a source of meat once the farmers became more established. Sheep were kept on most farms but seldom purely for wool. They were used as a source of food but often their chief value lay in the manure they produced for the croplands. Pigs also provided a source of meat with the advantage that the flesh could be readily preserved — often by salting but also by other techniques such as smoking. Poultry, ducks and geese were kept for meat and eggs.

A surprisingly large number of goats were kept on farms in the early years and, in fact, well towards the end of the century. Moore was most enthusiastic about their value:

There is no domestic animal more useful here than the goat; if I were again coming out I should bring a score a goats from the Cape; they are cheap, have frequently two at a birth, are more easily fed and managed than cows, and are not so liable to accidents. My goat has had four kids in one year.⁽³³⁾

The comparison with cows was indicative of their use on the farm — for milk, butter and cheese. Sometimes, of course, they were eaten. Aborigines called the goat a ‘piccanny [sic] cow.’⁽³⁴⁾

PASTORALISM:

Pastoralism and, in particular, the grazing of sheep, became the major activity in the new areas opened up over the hills in the 1830’s and remained so during the period under consideration. By the end of the thirties the major sheep areas lay between Toodyay in the north and Beverley in the south. In the next decade flocks were moved northwards from the Avon valley to the Victoria Plains and the Moore river and southwards to the Dale, Hotham, Williams and Arthur rivers. At the same time, sheep occupied the area between Albany and Kojonup and also moved north from the upper Swan to the Gingin area. The flocks of the coastal settlements at this time were not significant in terms of numbers though some were found at Augusta, Busselton, Bunbury and Pinjarra.

Why did pastoralism become so important when the original concern in the settlement had been with arable farming? Moore explained the situation capably in 1836:

Swan River is an instance of surprising success, considering what it had to struggle with. Its stability and progressive prosperity are now secured, especially within the last year; and how? Why, by that very course which they [the British or the local government?] seem so anxious to avoid, namely, by driving the population out of towns and concentrated places, and scattering them over the face of the country as a pastoral people. Pasture is and must be, at first, for a long time, the Chief and almost the only resource of colonies so situated as these are. There are no other natural resources which the means of a young colony could make available (always excepting whale and seal fishing, but even they require large capital and heavy expenditure). There are no natives or tribes in the interior to traffic with, as in South Africa. There are no natural products which the settler can collect. [One was soon discovered!] The curing of beef for exportation requires skill, labour and expense in managing it, in procuring salt, in making casks or cooperage. Sheep grazing is, certainly, the most suitable occupation for a new, extensive district, requiring as it does, a less proportion of annual expenditure for managing a large capital profitably invested than any other occupation. Vineyards require time, etc. Then, you see, that sheep grazing requires a large tract of land to run over, and if a large price is demanded for land, there is an end to that at once. If you will insist upon concentrating population, then there is also an end to that occupation. What does Mr B— say, after being six years here? I shall settle myself 15 miles from the nearest neighbour, that I may have room to myself on all sides for my cattle, and not be plagued with those eternal annoyances of mutual trespasses of cattle; for bear in mind that, with labour dear, as it must be in a new colony, fencing with post and rail costs near £ 100 per mile. Agriculture, except for self-supply, is also out of the question. You cannot compete for a long time with other well-established competitors who have their ground already brought into cultivation, their teams at work, their labour lower, their markets established, their mode of traffic arranged, and many other obvious things.⁽³⁵⁾

Sheep grazing was thus the most effective means of utilising the environment at that stage of pioneer development.

None of the sheep farms, or for that matter, the 'mixed farms' were completely fenced for many years. It was usual for the homestead to be fenced to prevent stock gaining access to the gardens (fruit and vegetables) which were usually located quite near the habitation. The fields where crops were grown were also soon fenced in order to keep stock out. But seldom were fences erected to confine stock. They were grazed on natural pastures in open but uncleared bush-land. For this reason shepherds were needed to take care of the

From the earliest days, good shepherds were scarce. In June, 1835, Moore noted:

The colony is now greatly in want of a few good, practical shepherds. They would be sure of getting from 40/- to 60/- a month besides being fed. It is surprising how much the condition of the flock depends on the goodness of the shepherd.⁽³⁶⁾

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A good shepherd had to possess a great variety of skills. Apart from particular character assets such as being able to work hard under difficult and primitive conditions, often totally by himself, he had to know how to manage sheep. But there were also other requirements: the ability to find good grass and fresh water for the flock in the one place and the ability to cope with hostile Aborigines. Perhaps his most serious problems were ones that troubled all the flocks for many years:

1

The scab disease.

2

Poisonous plants.

3

'Wild' and 'native' dogs.

SCAB

An affliction that troubled sheep in most flocks for many years was scab. The first statutory control of scab was introduced in 1857.⁽³⁷⁾ In fact, as late as 1866 and again in 1894 other Scab Acts were to be passed by the Western Australian government to safeguard pastoralists from the negligence of their neighbours and to control the areal spread of the disease.⁽³⁸⁾ Not until 1898 was the disease finally eradicated in W.A.

None of the sheep brought by the colonists from England was afflicted by the disease but it was introduced within a few years by sheep imported from Van Dieman's Land. By 1834 there were 3,545 sheep in the colony, half of which were at York where eight flocks were pastured.⁽³⁹⁾ None of those were affected by scab though sheep on the Swan pastures were suffering badly. Flocks driven across the ranges the following year took the disease to the Avon.⁽⁴⁰⁾ It was practically impossible to prevent the spread of the disease since grants were unfenced and were to remain so for many years.

The disease did not cause the death of sheep (though this commonly occurred in England) but it was highly contagious and, in badly affected sheep, ruined the fleece entirely. For this reason flockmasters regarded scab as a greater menace than poison, dogs, or Aboriginal attacks on the flocks.⁽⁴¹⁾

The treatment was simple though seldom immediately effective. It required the continued treatment of afflicted animals with a mixture of turpentine and tobacco water. The sheep were treated daily with a hot solution then the scab had to be lifted from the flesh — a rather nasty process. Landor has recorded entries from a shepherd's diary that refer to the disease:

July 2 [Probably 1842]:

Some scabby sheep having got among our flock, have played the deuce with it. The scab has regularly broken out. I had rather it were the plague or Asiatic Cholera . . . Dressed lambs all morning — beastly work.

July 5 and 6:

Dressed sheep all day.

July 7:

Muston and myself dressed fifty sheep today.

July 11:

Dressed sheep most of the day.

July 16:

Dressed sheep all day . . . Wish this job was over. Dreadful work bending one's back all day and rooting amongst the wool for the diseased places.⁽⁴²⁾

In time other dressings came to be used such as mercurial ointment but even then no miracle cures were achieved. The best that could often be done in the early days was to limit the spread of the disease. It is interesting to note that in order to provide tobacco for scab treatment some settlers did in fact commence its culture with some success. Edward Hammersley of York was asked whether he had grown tobacco when he appeared before the Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1887: "Yes, and it grows very well indeed. I had about three-quarters of an acre and was very successful with it. It was in the days when tobacco was generally used as a sheep wash."⁽⁴³⁾

The cost of scab was high in terms of potential wool exports — a cost the settlers could ill afford at that stage.

POISON

In the winter of 1833 the first serious losses of stock due to poisoning occurred in the colony. Over one hundred sheep from one flock died on the upper Swan. The occurrence was due to the movement, for the first time, of sheep from the alluvial flats along the Swan and Canning rivers to the foothills of the Darling Scarp. These deaths were not the first to occur from poisoning, the earliest being recorded in December, 1830, and there may well have been many others that were not recorded. They were to continue at a relatively high level throughout the thirties. It was not until early 1841 that the cause of death was to be positively identified.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Why did it take so long to identify this particular problem? In the first place, the symptoms were remarkably similar to diseases already known to the settlers from their English experiences ('hoove',

'stagers' and 'blood striking!'). All of these were caused by an inability to digest lush fodder. The immediate solution adopted by the colonists was therefore to avoid such situations and not to seek for any other cause. Secondly, the colonists did not at first suspect poisonous plants because native animals seemed to be immune to any poisoning by natural herbage. Not all domesticated animals were equally affected either, for though losses were severe with sheep and goats, they were not so high with cattle, whilst horses had a high resistance.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The third factor was the conflict of opinion as to the cause of stock deaths between two of the colony's leading scientists: Joseph Harris and James Drummond.

Harris was convinced that stock died from 'blood striking', a theory he advanced as early as the first serious stock losses in 1833.⁽⁴⁶⁾ He was a surgeon with some veterinary experience and a knowledge of English stock diseases. There is evidence that he was concerned about the colony's already unfavourable reputation and feared it might be degraded even further once the seriousness of the stock losses became known. It is possible he may have unconsciously suppressed evidence that might have pointed to toxic plants.

James Drummond, the colonial botanist, had from the first stock deaths suspected toxic plants. This belief was based on the similarity of vegetative associations in localities where deaths were reported.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Unfortunately he searched for plants similar to the toxic plants found in England and was not suspicious of pea flowered plants since he was convinced that, as legumes, they would be beneficial to stock. These plants he was to test only after all others had been rejected.

Fatalities became serious in 1835 when a general movement of stock to the Avon commenced. In May, Joseph Strelley Harris, drove his father's flocks over the hills from Guildford to York. Ninety-three sheep, fourteen goats and three bullocks died suddenly on the trip. It was this experience that caused the younger Harris to side with Drummond rather than support his father's theory of a disease.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The situation was desperate:

Deaths of stock were numerous and losses from inexplicable causes were becoming a more serious handicap to settlers than storms, droughts, fire, crop failure or native depredations put together. It was not easy for settlers to replace their stock.⁽⁴⁹⁾

The best that could be done immediately was to adopt avoidance techniques of various kinds. In June of 1835 it was common for stock to be driven hard all day, folded at night on bare ground, and allowed no food on the trip.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Later in the same year, animals were muzzled for their trip over the hills, a costly remedy.⁽⁵¹⁾ The best technique was to hand-feed stock with grain during the journey, a practice adopted by mid-1836.⁽⁵²⁾ Luckily there were no stock losses once the Avon had been reached but the drier conditions of the late 1830s, particularly in 1837, increased stock losses elsewhere.

The opening up of the Kojonup district for stock and the complete loss of three flocks (over nine hundred sheep) in September, 1840, brought the situation to a crisis point.⁽⁵³⁾ Drummond had been on a trip to King George's Sound and on his return stopped at the Williams where Harris had lost more sheep. There he found a plant similar to one common at Kojonup and one he had also observed on the York Road. So Drummond and Harris collected some plants, powdered them and administered the liquid to a young goat. It died in fourteen hours.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The plant was *Gastrolobium Calycinum*, to be known commonly as York Road Poison.

Not everyone was convinced. A visiting German botanist of some repute, Ludwig Preiss, drank a glass of an infusion of the leaves and suffered no ill effects. He insisted that "leguminous plants are particularly suited for the food of animals and the human race."⁽⁵⁵⁾ By this time Drummond, now suspicious of all native legumes, had discovered another in an area near Guildford where stock had died.

A committee of members of the Agricultural Society met at Guildford in May 1841 to test Drummond's theories. Using his newly discovered plant, which he named Blackadder Creek Poison after the locality where it was found, Drummond experimented on two sheep and a goat. All three animals died within four hours (as did also four dogs that fed on the entrails of the dead animals).⁽⁵⁶⁾

Dr Harris was now fully convinced and published a report supporting Drummond's discovery in the *Perth Gazette* of 22 May, 1841.

Once various plants had been identified as the cause of animal deaths, avoidance and control became possible. Poison areas soon came to be known and bypassed. It also became common to employ men to clear poison plants from roadsides. Shepherds, in particular, learnt to recognise the plants and so few stock losses occurred after mid-1841.

DOGS

A serious and continuing problem faced by the owners of stock, particularly sheep, was that of dogs. There were of two kinds: the wild dogs, which came to be known as dingoes, and the dogs owned by the aborigines. The latter were often European breeds or such animals crossed with the dingo. Both posed a problem difficult to control and almost impossible to eradicate. A problem faced by the investigator is that it is not always certain from contemporary accounts whether it is a wild dog or a native dog that the writer is referring to. It seems, however, that the dingo was soon exterminated in the Swan and Avon valleys and remained as a menace only in the distant bush runs and the deeper forests of the south-west⁽⁵⁷⁾

Native dogs were much more difficult to deal with. G.F. Moore, who had a farm on the Swan above Guildford, made frequent references to the seriousness of attacks by native dogs:

On July 24, 1833:

The shepherd and James sat up all last night in the sheepfold, watching [for] the native dog, and determined to shoot it; yet, with all their watching, when daylight came, they found two lambs torn to pieces in the fold.⁽⁵⁸⁾

On May 9, 1835:

On reaching home on Saturday night I was greeted with a bad piece of news, — a dog belonging to one of the natives had destroyed four of my sheep, and a fifth was in hospital.⁽⁵⁹⁾

On July 5, 1838:

A native dog attacked the flock today in broad daylight, singling out a fine lamb and hunting it down. He carried off another duck the night before last.⁽⁶⁰⁾

These attacks were all on Moore's property on the Swan. Wollaston recorded many similar incidents at his farm on the Preston River near Bunbury:

we experienced another loss from the native dogs, owing to the carelessness of Joe, the shepherd. Two of these cunning and voracious animals attacked the sheep in open day, when at too great a distance from their keeper and killed two lambs. . . They worried besides three others, one of them so much, that we were obliged to kill it.⁽⁶¹⁾

The settlers in the Avon valley suffered also from the attacks of native dogs. In the "Annual Report of the York Agricultural Society" for 1847 mention was made of this problem:

The numerous dogs of European breed in possession of the natives are now become a source of great annoyance and apprehension to the flockowners, and if something is not done to check this evil in time, it will get beyond control. We therefore, most respectfully suggest, that some legal enactment be made preventing persons from giving dogs to the natives, and that some immediate steps be taken to get rid of those in their possession.⁽⁶²⁾

In fact, the government did nothing!

Landor was one of the few who commented on the problem of the dingo. He seems to have suggested that careful shepherding was the key to controlling them:

The great enemies of the sheep in the Australian colonies are the wild-dogs. At York, and in the other settled districts, they are very troublesome and require the shepherd to keep a constant lookout. We were therefore much surprised to learn that although wild dogs abounded near this squatting station [sixty miles south of York, on the Hotham River] they never attempted to touch our flocks. A sheep to them was a new animal; they had yet to learn the value of mutton. A cowardly race, they are easily intimidated, and as they have not the art of jumping or clambering

over a fence, a low sheep-fold will keep them out, provided they cannot force their way under the palings or hurdles.⁽⁶³⁾

Not all dogs were regarded as pests. A good sheepdog was commonly considered to be as valuable as two men when mustering sheep. To many settlers a kangaroo dog was not only valuable but also a necessity, providing fresh meat when there was no other available.

In the year of food shortage, 1832, Moore wrote:

kangaroo hunting is very important to the settlers in their present circumstances. Some of my friends have had fresh meat of this animal for three months together, when it would have required three casks of pork, at £ 10 each, to have supplied their establishment during the same period. Thus have their dogs saved them 30.⁽⁶⁴⁾

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FLOCK MANAGEMENT

Most shepherds worked by themselves for almost all the year, taking care of a flock that might be as large as one thousand sheep though six or seven hundred was more the usual number. To assist him in his work he usually kept several sheepdogs, highly qualified animals that were greatly valued. Bells were used on the sheep to aid the shepherd in his care of the flock. There were normally eleven bells to a set. Since sheep always tended to graze or travel in a fairly set pattern — certain sheep always leading, certain sheep always drifting to the rear (tailers) whilst others always took up a position on the sides of the flock (wingers) — they were belled accordingly. There were two bells of each size and these pairs were numbered one to five, increasing in size. The large single bell, number six, was yoked to the sheep that was the flock leader, always a wether, and hence called the 'bell wether'! The medium sized bells were yoked on the wingers and the smallest bells on the tailers.

The shepherd would take the flock out to the pastures in the morning and then let them graze at will. From the sound of the bells he could tell where they were feeding. Agitated tinkling indicated they were not grazing steadily. This meant one of several possibilities: there was either a shortage of food in the area or an enemy, such as a dingo, had approached. Belled sheep always grazed in a compact mob and were thus easy to muster. Moore recorded a fascinating example of how sheep could grow accustomed to the sound of a particular bell:

Two blind sheep have been turned out daily for some time on the plain to graze. [Blindness was usually the result of eating less than a lethal amount of poison plants.] One of them was furnished with a bell, by the sound of which the other became accustomed to guide itself. Some days ago, the one with the bell was killed, and the other poor thing wandered about, went astray, and could not be found readily. James armed himself with the bell of the dead one, and went ringing through the bush. The lost one answered the signal immediately, and so we found a new way of catching sheep.⁽⁶⁵⁾

As time went on Aborigines were occasionally employed as shepherds. They usually worked without bells and so the sheep ranged further apart. The aborigines were able to locate them quite easily by tracking them. It was always found that flocks shepherded by Aborigines improved quicker than those more closely controlled.

At night the sheep were folded within light, portable wooden or metal hurdles. These were shifted frequently as the ground became fouled. If the shepherd had no cart to shift the hurdles he usually cut branches from trees to construct a fold. It was normal for the flocks to move slowly away from the homestead as winter commenced and then to return slowly as winter came to an end.

Shepherds lived in tents or roughly constructed, temporary huts. If several flocks operated from a central hut in a well grassed area the hut was usually more substantial and quite often a hut keeper was employed to cook meals, treat sick and injured animals and safeguard the supplies from marauding Aborigines. Huts were visited regularly by the flockmasters who brought food and fresh supplies of turpentine and tobacco.

The busiest times of the year for shepherds and flockmasters were those of lambing and shearing.

Lambing took place in autumn and care was needed in choosing an area with good grass and water since young lambs could not move far yet the ewes still had to graze. Since most shepherds received as their wages a percentage of the lambs, this was a critical time for them. Extra men were often employed to help.

Shearing was done in spring, usually at the homestead. It was normal practice for sheep to be washed before shearing so that homes were often sited near strongly flowing streams that could be used for this purpose. The sheep were scrubbed by men standing waist deep in the cold, running water. Of morbid interest are the statistics of deaths from pneumonia that occurred during the sheep washing months. It was the turn of the century before sheep-washing was abandoned.

Shearing was done by hand clippers, a slow process, for even 'gun' shearers could manage few more than thirty a day. Machine shearing was not introduced until the eighteen-nineties.⁽⁶⁶⁾

Land owners on the Swan often sent their flocks to the Avon when numbers increased beyond the capacity of their properties. The pastoralists or flockmasters on the Avon were paid either an agreed amount per hundred or a percentage of the natural increase. Moore was quoted a figure of £ 25 per hundred for the year in 1835, but he also had the alternative of giving up one third of the natural increase.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Presumably, in the latter case, the flock would be only ewes! Flockmasters often paid their shepherds in the same manner; either a fixed amount or a percentage of the increase. The latter was preferred by both. It was a better guarantee of careful attention by the shepherd at lambing time. Since the lambing rate on the

Avon was usually over 80%, flocks increased rapidly. the Perth Gazette of 4 June, 1836 told of one flockmaster who arrived at York in 1832 with fifty-five merino ewes. By the beginning of 1836, his flock had increased to 320. Landor, also, drew attention to the good returns from shepherding:

The emigrants who are most sure of improving their condition in a colony, are those men who begin as shepherds, and, having established a good character for themselves, undertake the care of a flock on shares; that is, they receive a certain proportion — a third, and sometimes even a half — of the annual increase and wool, delivering the remainder to the owner at the seaport, ready packed for shipping. These men, of course, soon acquire a flock of their own, and then abandon their original employer to his old embarrassment, leaving him, (a resident probably in the capital and already a prey to multitudinous distractions,) to find out a new shepherd on still more exorbitant terms. As large grants of land may be obtained by tenants for merely nominal rents, or in consideration of their erecting stock-yards or farm-buildings in the course of a term of years, there is every inducement to men of this class to become settlers.⁽⁶⁸⁾

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It was the rapid increase in the flocks of the Avon, which almost doubled each year in the early forties, that brought about the introduction of squatting in Western Australia, a practice already common in the eastern colonies. Moore recorded the first discussions about squatting in December, 1839:

People speak of squatting now — that is, of grazing on any unlocated ground and, when that is purchased, going to some other place. It would be an uncomfortable, roving sort of life without any fixed habitation, yet that is the way many have made their fortune at Sydney.⁽⁶⁹⁾

Many were to do the same in Western Australia! Pastoral licenses allowing grazing on Crown Lands were introduced in 1845 and thereafter new areas were quickly opened up north and south of the Avon. Illegal squatting had occurred several years earlier.⁽⁷⁰⁾

Thus, by 1850, an 'Australian' approach to agriculture had been commenced. Faced with a challenging new environment, settlers had adopted methods tried and tested in an environment where soils and climate differed. In many cases, though not in all, these methods had to be severely modified. Trial and error was the way this was achieved in the search for successful practices. Particularly in the case of soil appraisal, new methods were quickly adopted. At the end of this period there was yet little specialisation in particular fields of agriculture, except in sheep grazing, but the foundations had been laid for this to occur in the second half of the century.

CHAPTER 11

FOOTNOTES

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- 1 Stirling to Glenelg, September, 1838, Despatch No. 33, W.A.A.
- 2 E.W. Landor, *The Bushman; or, Life in a New Country*, p. 256.
- 3 G.F. Moore, *Diary of Ten Years Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia*, p. 102.
- 4 p. 141.
- 5 p. 85.
- 6 p. 105.
- 7 p. 104.
- 8 Samuel Moore's Farm Journal, A209, W.A.A.
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- 11 Bunbury, pp. 33-4.
- 12 Samuel Moore's Farm Journal, A209, W.A.A.
- 13 Moore, p. 354.
- 14 Bunbury, p. 35.
- 15 R. Erickson, *Old Toodyay and Newcastle*, p. 50.
- 16 p. 50.
- 17 *Inquirer*, 24 December, 1845.
- 18 *Inquirer*, 12 May, 1847.
- 19 F.C. Irwin, *The State and Position of Western Australia; Commonly Called the Swan River Settlement*, p. 7.
- 20 p. 10.
- 21 Bunbury, p. 42.
- 22 Moore, p. 155.
- 23 p. 247.
- 24 p. 95.
- 25 Irwin, p. 10.
- 26 Rev. Canon A. Burton, (ed.) *Wollaston's Picton Journal, 1841-44*, p. 126.
- 27 Moore, p. 396.
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- 31 Moore, p. 333.
- 32 Burton, p. 126.
- 33 Moore, p. 125.
- 34 p. 203.
- 35 pp. 299-300.
- 36 p. 270.
- 37 M. Bignell, *First the Spring, A History of the Shire of Kojonup*, p. 79.
- 38 F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, p. 105.
- 39 J.S. Battye, *Western Australia: A History of its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth*, p. 128.
- 40 Erickson, p. 12.
- 41 pp. 62-3.
- 42 Landor, pp. 258-62.
- 43 Report of the Commission on Agriculture, p. 43.
- 44 Perth Gazette, 17 May, 1841.
- 45 Landor, p. 379.
- 46 Perth Gazette, 21 September, 1833.
- 47 Perth Gazette, 19 October, 1833.
- 48 R. Erickson, *The Drummonds of Hawthornden*, p. 54.
- 49 p. 55.
- 50 Perth Gazette, 20 June, 1835.
- 51 Perth Gazette, 14 November, 1835.
- 52 Perth Gazette, 4 June, 1836.
- 53 Perth Gazette, 5 December, 1840.
- 54 Inquirer, 17 March, 1841.
- 55 Inquirer, 17 March, 1841.
- 56 Erickson, *The Drummonds of Hawthornden*, p. 60.
- 57 E. Millett, *An Australian Parsonage, or the Settler and the Savage in Western Australia*, p. 239.
- 58 Moore, p. 206.
- 59 p. 264.
- 60 p. 354.
- 61 Burton, p. 130.
- 62 Annual Report of the York Agricultural Society, 1847, W.A.A.
- 63 Landor, pp. 253-4.
- 64 Moore, p. 127.
- 65 p. 276.
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- 68** Landor, pp. 386-7.
69 Moore, p. 400.
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CHAPTER 12

THE ACCOMPLISHMENT: "MORE A SYMBOL THAN A SUCCESS"

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On 1 June, 1829 the *Parmelia* anchored in Cockburn Sound, bringing with her the settlers who were to pioneer a new environment. On 1 June, 1850, twenty one years later, the *Scindian* anchored in Cockburn Sound bringing with her seventy-five convicts as well as other people.⁽¹⁾ Thus, on the day she 'came of age', Western Australia became a penal colony, a bitter irony for, under the original conditions of establishment, convicts had been explicitly debarred forever from the colony.

They had not come as a result of an initiative by the British Government. They had come at the specific request of the colonists, a further irony since the colonists in the east of Australia had just requested and achieved a cessation of transportation to their shores.

Why had Western Australia asked for convicts at this time? What had gone wrong?

The colony had survived and had made progress — but it was very slow progress. A comparison with several of the eastern colonies shows how they had outdistanced Western Australia. Both Victoria and South Australia had been founded in 1836, seven years after Western Australia. Some settlement, but not a great deal, had pre-dated the official foundation year in Victoria but that had not been the case in South Australia. How had their progress compared with that of Western Australia?

The following table highlights the relative achievements:

| 1850 | WESTERN AUSTRALIA | SOUTH AUSTRALIA | VICTORIA |
|---------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| POPULATION | 5,000 | 50,000 | 50,000 |
| ACRES OF CROP | 8,000 | 50,000 | 40,000 |
| HORSES | 3,000 | 6,000 | 17,000 |
| CATTLE | 12,000 | 100,000 | 400,000 |
| SHEEP | 150,000 | 1,200,000 | 5,200,000 |
| PIGS | 2,500 | 1,500 | 6,000 |
| IMPORTS | £ 45,000 | £ 400,000 | £ 500,000 |
| EXPORTS | £ 35,000 | £ 500,000 | £ 600,000 |

Note

Source

The figures that relate to population are undoubtedly the most important. After twenty-one years of settlement, there were only 5,000 people or so in Western Australia. After only fourteen years of settlement both Victoria and South Australia had 50,000!

In terms of stock the disadvantage was not so great, certainly not when comparisons were made with South Australia. There were thirty sheep per person in Western Australia but only twenty in South Australia. Victoria, dominantly a grazing area, had 104 sheep per person. In terms of crop Western Australia led them both: one and three-third acres per person and one acre per person in South Australia and slightly less in Victoria.

The trade figures are the best guide to the relative economic situations in these colonies. In both South Australia and Victoria there was a healthy surplus in the value of exports above imports. Not so in Western Australia, where there was a deficit of £ 10,000 — a critical situation which meant that the colony was not paying its way even at such a late stage of development!

A publication entitled *The British Colonies*, and issued in 1850 had said:

In one, and in only one respect has the Swan River Settlement really failed, and that is in attracting immigration; in almost every other it has succeeded. Its trade has increased, crime among the Europeans is almost unknown, and its present settlers — who are in general its original settlers — have, in proportion to their numbers, affected a creditable extent of tillage, and evinced a very praiseworthy spirit.⁽²⁾

The early cessation of migration has been discussed in earlier chapters.

Once many of the early problems had been overcome — and most of these were — why had migration not recommenced? After the extension of settlement 'over the hills' and the discovery of extensive pastures in the Avon it was logical to expect that migrants would again commence to come.

There seems to be two basic reasons for this failure:

1

A continuance of bad publicity about the colony, much of it quite erroneous in fact.

2

Changes to the land regulations.

CONTINUING BAD PUBLICITY

It has been suggested by some researchers 'that during the first three or four years of settlement the population increased to as much as 5,000 people, and that the exodus, consequent upon the dissatisfaction of the settlers, brought it back to about 1,200'⁽²⁾ There is no

documentary evidence to support this claim. However, painstaking research by P.C. Statham has established that of all the settlers who arrived in the early years, 698 did in actual fact leave the colony by 1835.⁽⁴⁾

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There is also abundant evidence that many settlers left England intending to settle in Western Australia but passed on to the eastern colonies because of unfavourable reports of its situation that they received at the Cape or on arrival at Fremantle. An oft quoted case has been cited by Irwin, who described the failure of an early settler, due entirely to his own faults. This migrant had then left the colony and gone to live at the Cape of Good Hope:

There — not contented with disseminating the worst reports of Western Australia, little of which, if any, he could have seen, except the sandy district of the coast — he industriously sought out those emigrants, [to the Swan River Colony] who touched at the Cape; and, after telling them he had but lately left Swan River, proceeded to give such a description of the country as was calculated to deter them from prosecuting their voyage thither.⁽⁵⁾

The Hentys, capitalists and successful farmers, were one of the families who had given Western Australia a try, had been disappointed, and gone on to Van Dieman's Land.

Some prospective settlers had come from the eastern colonies but returned unimpressed to New South Wales or Van Dieman's Land and spread unfavourable reports about its situation.

Bad publicity for the colony also came from the failure of the Australind venture. The 'Western Australian Company' had been formed officially in May, 1840, with the intention of establishing a 'scientifically organised colony' on part of Colonel Latour's huge original grant of land at Port Leschenault.⁽⁶⁾ Because of a conflict over the validity of Latour's title to the 51,000 acres at the beginning, the project made a poor start. Many of the settlers were unsuitable to the task and faced the same trials and privations experienced by the colony's earliest settlers. By 1843 the project had collapsed. It might be noted that in one way at least the colony did gain a little from the venture in that a few badly needed labourers were introduced. The population had increased from 2,760 in 1841 to 3,476 in 1842.⁽⁷⁾

Overall, however, the colony suffered badly since it was demonstrated once more that Western Australia as a place for settlement was a risky proposition.

A continuing source of bad publicity for the colony was the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners who, if not damning, were totally ignoring the possibilities of Western Australia.⁽⁸⁾ As early as the beginning of 1831 this body had reported: "The only places to which we consider that emigrants can proceed with advantage at this season are New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land."

Later in the year a circular sent out by the Commissioner had warned: "The Commissioners for Emigration take this opportunity of announcing that they are not prepared to undertake the conveyance of emigrants to the settlement on the Swan River."⁽⁹⁾

Along with the failure of the Commissioners to promote Western Australia at any stage must be ranged the powerful organisations eager to advance the causes of other Australian colonies. Significant amongst these were the South Australian enthusiasts capably led by E.G. Wakefield.⁽¹⁰⁾ Similar bodies were influential in directing many English migrants to British colonies in Africa and North America.

CHANGES IN THE LAND REGULATIONS

The land regulations applying within the colony had been altered soon after settlement and came into force early in 1831. Early in 1830 the British government had decided that "in the interests of the colony generally, and in order to stem the influx of settlers, many of whom were totally unsuitable, it was necessary to make some restriction of the further alienation of land by means of grants."⁽¹¹⁾ For every £ 3 invested a grant of 20 acres was given instead of 40, and the amount allowed for the passage of each servant or labourer was reduced from 200 acres to 100.

After reviewing the system of grants the British government decided then to abolish them completely. They did this because they believed grants were a major factor in dispersing settlement and thus increasing the cost of colonial administration.⁽¹²⁾ The decision, to abolish grants and substitute sales only, was reached on March, 1831 and applied in Western Australia from January, 1832 onwards. All lands in the colony not hitherto granted and not appropriated for public purposes were put up for sale. The price depended on the quality and the location of the land but was never to be below 5/- an acre.⁽¹³⁾

Persons desirous of purchasing land were permitted to select within certain defined limits. The selected portions were to be advertised for a period of three months and then sold to the highest bidder, providing a price of not less than 5/- an acre was realised. Ten per cent of the whole value had to be paid at the time of sale and the remainder within one calendar month from the day of sale. A fee of 40/- was payable to the Colonial Secretary for preparing the grant and another fee of 5/- for enrolling it. It was contemplated that land would be put up in lots of 640 acres. [The maximum was to be 2,560 acres in any one block].⁽¹⁴⁾

The Crown reserved to itself the right of taking timber, stone, and other material from the land for the construction of roads and bridges, and also reserved to itself all mines of precious metals. The only concession offered to settlers was an abatement of £20 on the purchase price of the land for the passage of every married labourer and his family taken to the settlement by the applicant.⁽¹⁵⁾

This was a serious blow to the colony. There is no doubt that emigrants intent on settling in Australia were tempted to go to the eastern colonies where land was no more expensive yet success seemed more likely.

Early in 1837 a petition was presented to the Governor asking him to recommend changes in the land regulations to the British Government.⁽¹⁶⁾ The settlers expressed their belief that the land sale system had checked migration. A return to the land grant system for three years was requested and a suggestion was made that each bona fide new settler should receive 2,560 acres free and be permitted to purchase more at 3/- an acre.⁽¹⁷⁾

The petition was forwarded. The response of the British Government was to raise the minimum price of land in all the Australian colonies to 12/- an acre, a price which was to operate in Western Australia from July, 1840.⁽¹⁸⁾ It was soon after raised to 20/- an acre (June, 1843).⁽¹⁹⁾

There is no doubt that the continuing bad publicity and the changes in the land regulations both contributed significantly to the failure of the colony to attract new migrants. The most serious result of this fact was the severe shortage of labour, a complaint that echoes again and again through the pages of settlers diaries, local newspapers, petitions and the proceedings of the Legislative Council.

Settlers came to believe that the shortage of labour was their single main problem. All others were seen as results of this situation: — the unfavourable balance of trade, the decline in land alienation the failure of the colony to attract shipping and so on.

There is no doubt that the huge amount of land that had been alienated in the early years was to a large degree not being utilised. Primarily shortage or lack of labour was the reason. For example, by the end of 1837, the land alienated totalled 1,524,000 acres, roughly 2,032 acres for every man in the colony yet only 2,123 acres were cultivated.⁽²⁰⁾

PROSPECTS

Western Australia had been the first colony founded on the continent that had based its major appeal on fertile soil and the possibilities of successful agriculture.

In his 'Observations on the Territory' (this is distinct from the Narrative of Operations) submitted to Governor Darling at Sydney on 18 April, 1827 after the return from his survey of the Swan River, Stirling had specified its advantages. Along with the possibilities of agricultural production he had stressed the possibilities of extensive fisheries, its suitability as an extensive hospital establishment for Europeans in the Civil and Military services of the East India Company and its value as a Naval and Military station.⁽²¹⁾ Not one of these possibilities had eventuated by 1850. Neither had the trade that he so glowingly forecast:

The China Ships, outward bound through the eastern passages, might here find not only refreshments, but many articles to make up a cargo for the Chinese Market, while an anchorage safe and easily approachable during the greater part of the Year, would make their arrival and departure Convenient. Ships from England bound to New South Wales might also touch here and perhaps find commodities suited to the wants of the Eastern Coast.⁽²²⁾

The trade that had occurred had been insignificant. The first exports had been in 1834 when wool to the value of £758 had been sent to England.⁽²³⁾ By 1850 this had risen to £15,482 and was the major item of export.

Beginnings had been made in the export of items that were to be of great significance in the latter half of the century, whale oil, timber, sandalwood and horses. It is interesting to note that in 1848, sandalwood to the value of £12,533 had been exported compared to wool to the value of £9,666.⁽²⁴⁾ Thereafter wool surged ahead as an export item.

1850

The settlement had survived and had slowly expanded. By 1850 its population had reached almost 6,000 and though less than 8,000 acres were under cultivation the colony's sheep numbered almost 150,000. It had not been twenty one years of outstanding success but on the other hand it had not been total failure. Foundations had been laid on which others were to build. Let the words of Geoffrey Blainey give a final summing up of this period:

The flocks of black swans which floated on the wide river were decimated by settlers' guns and dogs, but black swans still multiplied at a faster rate than white men. The soil, the scope for trade with tropical lands, had both been exaggerated. The new colony was more a symbol than a success. Like the earlier settlements strung along Australia's coast, it was chosen because of its strategic importance, but it also reflected a new form of colonisation. It was the first Australian colony or coastal outpost to be founded largely by private settlers rather than by a government. It was the first — since the original settlements of 1788 — which hoped to grow not only its own foodstuffs but raw materials (tobacco, cotton and flax) for export to Europe. Its founders were more interested in the promise of Australian soil than any previous colonisers. They heralded a swing of interest from Australian seas to Australian land.

Western Australia was the first new colony to fight the problem of distance from Europe without the generous aid of the British government; for the expensive ship fares of most newcomers to eastern Australia had been gladly paid by the British government, and moreover much of the demand for agricultural products in Eastern Australia had been financed by the British treasury in order to feed its establishment of officials, soldiers and convicts.

Western Australia failed to master that problem of distance, and became through its own choice a goal for British convicts in 1850.⁽²⁵⁾

CHAPTER 12

FOOTNOTES

- 1 J.S. Battye, **Western Australia: A History of its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth**, p. 207. 171
- 2 Sir H. Colebatch, (ed.) **A Story of a Hundred Years: Western Australia, 1829 - 1929**, p. 55.
- 3 p. 60.
- 4 P. Statham, "Arriving at Population Figures for the Swan River Colony, 1829 - 1850", MSS, University of Western Australia.
- 5 F.C. Irwin, **The State and Position of Western Australia; Commonly Called the Swan River Settlement**, p. 43.
- 6 G. Blainey, **The Tyranny of Distance**, p. 155.
- 7 Battye, p. 160.
- 8 Blainey, p. 155.
- 9 Colebatch, p. 43.
- 10 Sir S.H. Roberts, **History of Australian Land Settlement, 1788 - 1920**, p. 155.
- 11 Battye, p. 107.
- 12 p. 108.
- 13 p. 108.
- 14 p. 108.
- 15 Colebatch, p. 55.
- 16 **Perth Gazette**, 28 January, 1837.
- 17 Battye, p. 140.
- 18 p. 140.
- 19 p. 170.
- 20 Roberts, p. 154.
- 21 M. Uren, **Land Looking West**, p. 290.
- 22 p. 290.
- 23 Battye, p. 138.
- 24 R. Erickson, **Old Toodyay and Newcastle**, p. 73.
- 25 Blainey, p. 95.

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